MY MOTHER AND I

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO · DALLAS
ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

MY MOTHER AND I

BY

E. G. STERN

WITH A FOREWORD BY

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1925

All rights reserved

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Copyright, 1916,
By The Curtis Publishing Company.

Copyright, 1917,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Set up and electrotyped. Published, June, 1917.

FERRIS
PRINTING COMPANY
NEW YORK CITY

TO

LEON STERN

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/mymotheri0000eliz

FOREWORD

Sagamore Hill.

This is a really noteworthy story — a profoundly touching story — of the Americanizing of a young girl, who between babyhood and young womanhood leaps over a space which in all cultural and humanizing essentials is far more important than the distance painfully traversed by her fore-fathers during the preceding thousand years. When we tend to grow disheartened over some of the developments of our American civilization, it is well worth while seeing what this same civilization holds for starved and eager souls who have elsewhere been denied what here we hold to be, as a matter of course, rights free to all — although we do not, as we should do, make these rights accessible to all who are willing with resolute earnestness to strive for them. I most cordially commend this story.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

MY MOTHER AND I

MY MOTHER AND I

I

THE mere writing of this account is a chain, slight but never to be broken; one that will always bind me to that from which I had thought myself forever cut off. For I am writing not only of myself. In myself I see one hundred thousand young men and women with dark eyes aflame with enthusiasm, or blue eyes alight with hope. In myself, as I write this record, I see the young girl whose father plucked golden heavy oranges in Italian gardens, the maiden whose mother worked on still mornings in the wide fields of Poland, the young man whose grandmother toiled in the peat-bogs of Ireland. I am writing this for myself and for those who, like me, are America's foster-children, to remind us of them, through

whose pioneer courage the bright gates of this beautiful land of freedom were opened to us, and upon whose tumuli of grey and weary years of struggle we, their children, rose to our opportunities. I am writing to those sons and daughters of immigrant fathers and mothers who are now in America, to those who will come after this devastating war to America, and to those who will receive them.

I am a college woman. My husband is engaged in an honourable profession. Our home is unpretentious but pretty, and is situated in a charming old suburb of an American city where attractive modern residences stand by the side of stately old Colonial houses, as if typifying young America in the shadow of old America. Our work has been shifting us over the country's face; we have been in the Gulf States, in the Middle West, in New York. Until now we have never lived near my former home where my father and mother still are. Perhaps I should never have seen into mother's heart, into her life as related to my own, if she had not come

last winter to visit us. That brief visit of mother's brought back old pictures. . . .

Those old pictures! Somehow they had all been wiped out from my mind by the beautiful new things in my life. I am so happy, so blessed. We live simply, my husband, our boy, and I. We have enough to keep us unembittered. Our friends are men and women who are busy with the making of worth-while American homes, with the interests of American politics, and with literature and art. Our evenings are full of music or good plays or pleasant society. Sometimes my husband and I plan some work which we do together. All our days are crowded to the full with plans and activities which, we hope, are worth-while not only to us, but to others.

It may be because everything is so normal in my life that I cannot think of myself as a "problem"; I cannot think of my mother as a "problem." Part of our work during the past six years has been in the settlement house, in the playground, in the night school. The young people I have met there have come to

me with their problem, the problem of " how to be American." I had never thought in all those last six years that there was a relationship between them and me. It is six years since I left home; it is six years since my life has been made over again. With my mother's coming then fell open the door closed upon the past. It does not lie in my power to tell how strange it seemed to me to look back.

II

I REMEMBER best of all a room we called the "kitchen" in the ghetto of a city in the middle west. The ghetto of that city is part of a sorry district which I shall call "Soho." Mother tells me that I was two years and one-half old, as old as my little son now is, when my infant sister Fanny, Mother, and I came to that kitchen twenty-five years ago to join my father. We came from a little cottage in a small Russian Polish town to the ghetto of an American city.

We called our room the "kitchen," although it was the one and only room in our new "home." It opened into a narrow alley from which stairs led up to a courtyard. In that day there were no inconvenient housing laws, and a clever landlord had placed board flooring in a cellar, partitioned it off, and rented it to immigrant families. Our kitchen

was usually damp because water (rain or "clothes-water") would persist in following the laws of gravity with a stupid invariability, and the result was that on rainy days, and on wash days in the court above us, our kitchen was frequently swamped. Fanny, the new American baby Mary, and I, quite filled the tiny room. In addition there were a gas stove, a table, a huge book-case holding father's many, many Hebrew books, two chairs, a trunk covered with steerage labels, a cot, a box, a cradle, a big kitchen clock, and a stove-pipe.

"Stove-pipe" may be a misleading name. When father first arrived in America he became rabbi of a tiny town. His congregation, eager to emulate their American neighbours, insisted that he wear silk hat and frock coat. Father absolutely refused to consider the frock coat; it seemed hideous to him after the scholarly kaftan or gown which he had worn as a scholar in Russia. But poverty drove disinclination partially into hiding, and he was forced to go about the town, a timid young fellow in his conspicuous silk hat.

With his next congregation he adroitly forestalled their intention to have him again don the hated silk hat by confiding to them that his suit was so shabby that he required a new one to go with the silk hat. That meant a larger salary. He was not asked to wear the silk hat. Mother thriftily decided that so valuable a thing as the " stove-pipe " (that was what the silk hat was called in Soho) must not be wasted. So in my childhood father's silk hat filled the curious but useful function of holding the family onions. I always thought silk hats were called " stove-pipes " because they stood behind the stove, where mother kept ours.

More interesting to us than the stove-pipe was our kitchen clock. In the eyes of our neighbours the clock possessed not only quality worthy of favourable notice, for its erratic hour strokes never would conform to the strict rules observed by less original clocks. But to us children our clock was part of the family life. Moreover, on its glass door was painted a figure, and about that figure there was a story. A friend of father's had seen

the figure represented on its door. When father's friend had come to America he and the others had travelled days upon days with only blank seas before their eyes. But one morning they heard a cry, "Land!" He looked out and all he could see was the line of the harbour, and a lady, a magnificent lady who stood as tall and as stately as did the countess at home. Behind her was the expanse of the sky, above her was the sun, and all the great sea flowed to her feet. He pointed to her. A man cried joyfully, "The Lady of Liberty — America!" That lady was the lady painted on the door of our clock. "And I, then mother, and Fanny, and you too saw her," father would add.

My own baby mind had retained no image or memory of the Lady of Liberty. From the story, however, I always imagined the entrance to America as a gleaming, vast expanse of water where tall ships came sailing in, to stop directly before Bartholdi's great statue of Liberty, that welcomes strangers at the gate of America.

III

WHEN I had just turned four my parents sent me to learn Hebrew. Even at that early age father began to prepare me for my destiny, to be the wife of a rabbi or a scholar, and so to continue in America the tradition of both his and mother's families, in which there have been scholars and rabbis for generations.

In our kitchen in Soho father would sit at the table, his cheeks cupped in his palms, an open book before him, until mother stepped near and said something very quietly to him, or touched his haggard, bearded face with her worn hand. Thereat father would lift his deep-set eyes to her. Often in the evenings father's friends came in, bearded men much older than he. They spoke of their "jobs" in shops, or described to father long hours spent in carrying great pedlars' sacks through the little towns nearby. They would

straighten bent shoulders, and sigh. Then they settled themselves about father. It would be close and hot in the little room, where we were all so crowded that we could barely move without jostling one another. But the men chanted aloud in clear voices, and father's face became illumined as he read aloud from the Talmud to them. We children played quite silently, huddled between the table and the stove, and mother sat at her work.

Father would be very tired when he came home from his work. "This is Columbus' land," he would say wearily. He found that the rabbinate did not pay enough for the needs of his growing family, and he was compelled to look for manual work, work unsuited to his slight student's frame, and to his scholastic trainng. When two years ago I saw "Bunty Pulls the Strings," I was startled to note how much alike were those Scotch folk and my father in their intensity, their sombre idealism, their religious inflexibility, their hidden tenderness. Only mother seemed able to strike the depths of father.

I can never remember my mother in my childhood in any other than one of two positions, standing at the stove cooking, or sitting in the corner; her foot rocking the cradle, and her hands stitching, stitching. Mother eked out the family income by making aprons — by hand! A neighbour, Mrs. Stone, peddled them. Mother was then twenty-seven years old, as old as I now am. On rare occasions when mother was obliged to leave the house she would tie Fanny to one leg of the table, and me to the other. It was most uncomfortable all around, and especially to the neighbours, for we two children protested with the full power of our lungs until mother would return. It was not often that mother went out of the kitchen.

At dusk we would sit in the little room and mother would tell us of the garden "at home," of the apple trees, and of the "wald," or wood, with the spring flowing through it. "At home" they had trees everywhere, and cows simply rolled in grass. There we children had had cow's milk and goat's milk every day, while here as I knew (for I helped

mother to do it) we diluted the milk with water that there might be enough to go around. Mother described to us the goat which was so tame that it followed her; we knew the story of the uncle who always said that he would die were he to drink goat's milk, and how one day mother placed a bowl of goat's milk before him, and he drank it and asked for more. "That means that one must not dislike anything to eat," mother told us. We knew of the time when father came to visit mother, and how he and she walked by the brook in the companionship of the staid chaperon. Father had been too shy to utter a word "going or back," and mother had almost "died trying to keep her tongue still also," lest her suitor, so proper and modest, might think her bold. On hot days, when we sat stifling and listless in our kitchen, mother would make us laugh by saying, "But you should see the spring at home, children. You would splash in it — so! — and so!" We would ask, "How big is the spring, mammele? As big as — a wash-tub?" And then suddenly mother would look away, and

smile "a crooked smile," after the quaint jargon phrase, a smile only on her lips. She would say, "Better run upstairs outside. It is cooler in the alley."

Father never saw the tears which filled mother's eyes on those occasions.

It was not father alone who never saw tears in mother's eyes. We children knew that whatever happened in our home not one word might we disclose to our neighbours. For if we did, mother assured us with the greatest solemnity, grandfather and grandmother in Poland might hear of it. And that would be dreadful, we comprehended, though we did not know why. No one who came down to our kitchen knew whether there was black bread in the cupboard, and milk for us children. Before supper the hucksters would gather in the alley to sell in Soho the wares left from sales in better neighbourhoods. We would hold fast to mother's apron, unable to remove our gaze from the delicious turnips and carrots and potatoes lying in the wagons. We waited for mother to ask the huckster, as she pointed to a

vegetable, "How much is this?" Sometimes she would buy potatoes and carrots, to cook them into a sweet, thick soup for us. But at other times, when the huckster replied to mother's inquiry, she would say, pleasantly, "No, I do not need any to-day." Those words meant, we children knew, that we would have bread and diluted milk for supper. We wondered why, simply because the huckster named a sum, mother would tell him that we did not *need* any to-day!

One day there was a great knocking at the door of our kitchen and a huge voice boomed out, "Hey! Hey!"

Mother rushed to the door. There at the foot of the steps leading down from the street stood a ruddy-cheeked, laughing fellow, a strange huckster whom we had never seen in the neighbourhood before.

The apron mother held fell to the floor.

"Why, it's Miss Sarah," cried the strange huckster.

"And you're Simeon the stable boy," said mother kindly.

We children listened as he told mother of

his trip to America, of his success at huckstering, of his mother who had been a servant of grandmother's. Then he stopped. Mother said nothing. The huckster looked at us, then his gaze pierced into the dimness of our kitchen. His big face grew redder and redder. He stammered out: "Won't you — wouldn't you, Miss — take some potatoes — you needn't pay me — until —"

Mother stood up so straight, her cheeks grew pink, and her eyes snapped. "We do not need any to-day," she said. "I am sorry. But you may come next week!"

Sometimes this attitude of mother's brought us into such uncomfortable situations. For example, there was one holiday when mother and father had been saving for days, and the cupboard was full of an unexampled store of apples and matzos and even raisin wine. There was also a wealth of potatoes. It seemed that there were to be actual banquets in the days to come. Then, unexpectedly, "right from the sky," came three countrymen of mother's. For days they had not eaten, they said; they had known

the generosity of her father in the past. Not one moment did mother hesitate. She gave us children a glance, half merry, half aghast, and set before the visitors — the holiday feasts. They *were* hungry! We children watched them fascinated. They spoke of strange cities where they had been. They told tales which at other times would have kept us with mouths agape about them. But all that my sisters and I could see were the heaped dishes growing emptier and emptier — until they were quite empty. Mother said, scraping the copper pot, " Will you have more? " But they had had enough. They left with many a word of thanks. One was to enter a cantorship in a city in the west. One was to become a pedlar. One was to " work for " his brother. To each mother wished god-speed. Then she gathered us about her, and looked from one child to the other. Presently she said cheerily, " A clear conscience is better than a full stomach." And we had weak tea and metzos during the feasts of Passover.

IV

WHEN I was old enough I helped mother to sew, I rocked the babies, and I played hopscotch, "cat-and-dog," and the other games of the street with the boys about us. Much of my child-life before I entered public school was spent in joyous running and climbing. My gentle uncle would say, "Play now, childie, you must sorrow later," words which he and father and mother seemed to understand together.

Until I went to school all my playmates lived in the alley near us. I felt very superior to the timid, pale little girls. But with the little boys I would play "stick-up" with a rusty pen-knife on the broken wooden door-steps, and run like the wind over cluttered pavements.

Playing was forbidden. It was in the eyes of the wise adults in our courtyard a waste of

time. Our neighbours permitted their children to play only on suffrance, and most of my companions understood that any child of seven or eight caught frolicking merited punishment from a tired and harassed mother. We children knew that throwing ball endangered the property of the tenement owners, that skipping rope obstructed passage, and if we threw a particularly clever "cat" a wagon was sure to come tearing down the cobble-stones. Often we barely escaped with our lives.

"But it's so crowded indoors," mother would say quietly to her neighbours when they scolded children tumbling out from hot tenement rooms all about us. And the mothers would wish for the ideal, the unattainable: "Why can't little folk sit still!"

It would have been impossible for me to sit still. I was constantly dancing out of the house, or running into it to tell mother what I had done in the alley. I would tell her all the thrilling things that we had done in play, sure of her understanding, anxious for the twinkling light of laughter in her eyes. She

was as much part of my play as any child in the street.

I have not described mother, or mammele, as we call her. She is small and plump and red-cheeked. Her eyes are black and dancing. Now that wrinkles cross her cheeks her pious black wig seems strange, though it is actually the colour of her own silky, black hair beneath it. She has not changed in all the years, except to grow gayer, jollier.

By our neighbours I was considered a wild thing, a tomboy, badly spoiled by my mother. When a disapproving matron informed her that I was "playing again," she would come out to look for me, and she would say, that all might hear, "Aren't you ashamed! A big eight-year-old almost! You'll get it yet!" Thereupon I would follow her into our kitchen in great meekness of attitude, but with my pulse quite normal. The proprieties having been observed, she would close our door, her eyes would twinkle, and after a moment she would say, "You had better chop the farfal, childie." I would seat myself beside the cradle, rock the baby with one

foot, hold the wooden bowl firmly on my lap and chop the stiff dough into the little bits of dough which mother cooked with meat as a vegetable, and which we called "farfal." Mother would smile to Fanny and Mary and me. And presently she would tell us a story with a moral neatly tucked in.

V

DESPITE mother's clever ruse the neighbours knew very well of her deception and they by no means shrank from expressing their disapproval. However it was difficult to hold my incurable wickedness against me, for as mother astutely told my detractors, notwithstanding my American propensity for play, I wrote the best Yiddish letter composed by a female of any age in Soho; I possessed a "God's gift for writing, really," she would declare. Indeed, at the ripe age of eight I was writing most of the love-letters, filial letters, marital letters, and letters of condolence sent from Soho to Russia by our illiterate neighbours. After I entered public school I conducted their English correspondence also. I was paid two cents a letter, the paper being furnished by me.

The hopes and sorrows of many a family

in Soho were inextricably twined into our life. For it was as if all the life of Soho streamed through our little kitchen, through mother's life and mine, by way of those letters which I wrote for our neighbours.

By far the larger number of those for whom the letters were written were women, for it was only the very rare ghetto female whose parents had, in her childhood, thought it worth while to expend tuition upon the education of a mere girl. The men who were unlettered felt their misfortune keenly; their epistles were oftener written in the friendly shelter of their own kitchens than at our table, where they would be obliged to stand abashed before the gaze of my father.

For the men I invariably wrote in the evenings after they returned from the day's peddling or huckstering. Many of their letters could not have been written at all had not mother been at hand to help me. Despite a most fluent use of speech during every moment of their lives, the mere sight of my pen transferring their words indelibly upon paper seemed to give them an extraordinary

affection of tongue and throat. There was Perez, who could call his potatoes louder than any huckster in Soho, and whose "Women, women, ten cents a peck!" was a jest heard and enjoyed every Thursday by matrons three blocks from his wagon. Perez would grow hoarse and absolutely witless at sight of my pen travelling over the paper. I could never have written one letter for him if mother had not translated his grunts and embarrassed blushes, and extracted by sympathetic questions and tactful suggestions the information he wished to send to his father and to his sweetheart in Europe. "I tell you it takes a scholar's daughter to look paper in the face," he would declare to mother. And mother, yielding the compliment to me, would say, "I am proud to have a scholar as a husband."

Best of all I loved to write for the women. The men merely desired me to tell the state of their health, to write how much they had "been raised" in the store or factory, and to end with, "I hope we'll be together soon." That was all. Hucksters and tailors and

toby-makers had no imagination, I discovered early. But it was different with their sisters and mothers and wives. The unmarried women waited until after shop-hours to have their letters written. During the day the matrons would come in, heavy babies in their arms, and all their children, my playfellows, behind them. They would seat themselves. They would tell mother of the new spigots which the landlord had promised all the tenants when he increased their rent; they would descant upon the difficulties they encountered in making their boys "behave"; boys were so strangely unmanageable in America. They would tell of the grown daughter's beau, dwelling particularly upon his earning capacity and the fact that he "was stylish," but adding apologetically to mother, "I guess your husband, though, might look cross-eyed upon him. He — doesn't observe the Sabbath." Then would be discussed all the deaths in the ghetto, and the women would decide who would volunteer to help care for the children of the bereaved family while the older folks sat in mourning.

Mother would be stitching busily all the time, and nodding her head in sympathy, or with appreciation of a jest, or in disapproval. After all the aspects of health, economic situations, and hopes had been considered, they would say to me, "Have you time maybe to write me a letter to-day?" Thereupon I would take down the bottle of ink, the pen, and the lined paper. Mother would draw closer to the table, the neighbour would quiet her children, and I would begin to write.

The work of an afternoon followed. There were certain definite literary requirements which I should never have thought of neglecting to observe. First of all I must be sure to state that "all were in good health," and hoped "this finds the receiver in the same." Ten lines later, as if the report of good health had never been written, I would be describing with minute precision the illnesses of the children, the parents, and their friends. Each woman wished her letter to be embroidered with philosophic reflections, always of pessimistic colour, with a little resigned phrase now and then interposed,

nullifying, but not quite nullifying, the sadness. What they desired beyond all else was to have their letters beautiful, the script clear, "like print," and the pages full of flowing idioms so that their missives would be read with admiration in the quiet little European villages, or in the ghettos of American cities.

Though mother chided me for it, in my heart I would hope for letters of condolence, for these I could fill with the sagest reflections, the most resigned and eloquent compassion, and the wisest advice. A letter to one who had lost his position or who had suffered bereavement, was a work of art. I would insert quotations which I had heard father repeat from the Talmud. With all the philosophy of nine years of life I would, in the person of the neighbour for whom I wrote, adjure the unhappy one to follow my precepts, and to "lift his heart."

Writing was as much a joy to me as playing, mother truly said. Often I was asked to express strange things which I could only dimly divine. But what I could not quite comprehend, I would phrase all the more

beautifully, and the women, I marked with wonder, would actually admire those portions of the letter more than any other part. At each paragraph I would pause to read aloud what had been written. Shaking her bewigged head, our neighbour would meet mother's gaze. She would exclaim in an undertone, but loud enough for all the malignant spirits to hear (lest if any ill befall me she be blamed for it): "May the evil eye not strike the child!" And when in the replies from Europe the professional letter writer there would tell my client: "Your last epistle was read from house to house, and people licked their fingers to hear it," mother's pride in her small daughter would brim over in a dimpling, radiant smile. It never occurred to her that the letters were as much her accomplishment as mine.

Sometimes when I ran down into the kitchen from my play or from school mother would look up from her work to say, "Is this the second Tuesday in the month?" And if it was we knew that a letter was due to be sent to the sister of Mrs. K——, the practical

nurse. Later when I grew older there was also a letter to be written on the first Monday of every month to the wife of Moishe the bricklayer. These letters were written without the presence of the senders when they could not spare the time from their daily work. However, we know almost as well as did they their income, their health and their hopes; and so frequently it happened that mother decided quite without consulting them how much to tell and what to withhold from their relatives far away. Pen poised, I waited until she settled the knotty problem: "Ought Moishe B—— to write to his wife in Russia that he had broken his leg in falling from the house on which he was at work?" "Yes," she would say, "Moishe ought to tell his wife of the accident because that will explain to her why he can send her so little money this month, and she will be rejoiced to hear that he is alive and not even crippled." But when I inquired, in writing the letter for Mrs. Braun, wife of the rich tailor, "Shall I tell her mother that the little grandchild is dead of the children's sickness?" mother said

quickly, "No. Death casts a far shadow."

Of all the letters there was one truly difficult to do. That was the letter sent at rare intervals by Polish Anna who had come to America from mother's native town. Anna always had a half dozen little Polacks tagging after her, their smudgy, fair faces almost as blonde as their straight flaxen hair. With her arms bare to the elbow, and red from soap and hot water, Anna would come in at noon, while her clothes dried and I was at home for the school lunch hour.

To a stranger it might have appeared an impossible undertaking for me to write a letter for Anna. She knew neither Yiddish nor English. I could not write Polish nor understand it. But mother devised a way: Anna would tell her in Polish what she wished to say, mother would translate Anna's Polish into Yiddish for me, and I would write. To express her simple thoughts, her simple tragedies, was a tremendously complex labour for the Polish girl. She and mother would speak for many moments about every sentence which I wrote. Ultimately there would

be filled two pages. The letter would be addressed to my grandparents. In Poland grandmother would send for Anna's mother, and to the old peasant she would translate into Polish the Yiddish letter from America.

But I dreaded the replies to Anna much more than the writing of her letters. Every week she would ask timidly, "Is there a letter from home?" And if we said "no" she would just bow her head, but if we replied "yes" she would cry "dobje! dobje! — good! good!" Anna laughed and wept all the way through the reading of the sentences. After the letter had been read to her she would kiss our hands. I would feel so ashamed to have her kiss our hands. My cheeks would grow red and tears would fill my eyes. I could not explain to my parents but it seemed to me that through Anna's kissing of my hand both Anna and I became small and mean. Very gently mother would pat my head as she told me that it would make Anna unhappy indeed were we to forbid her to do this; she would be humiliated, fright-

ened, thinking that we were no longer friendly to her, for that was the way by which she had been taught to express her appreciation of kindnesses. "And," mother would add with a wholesome smile, "better wash your hands next time before Anna comes!" But, although I laughed, there lay deep in me a sense of wrong which the years and repetition did not wipe out.

In writing the letters for our neighbours there was one topic I knew that each one was embarrassed to discuss or even to mention. That topic was one upon which mother admonished me I must inquire in a whisper. "How much shall I say you are sending this time?" I would ask, lowering my voice. And the reply was usually murmured into my ear that none of my playfellows, their children, might hear and repeat. Of course, mother told me, I must feel it was a matter of honor on my part never to disclose it. The strange part of this reticence was that there was hardly one person near us who did not "send to Europe" some small sum for father or brother or mother, or most frequently of

all, for wife and children. Yet any suggestion that would indicate a need for the money on the part of the family abroad was considered a personal reflection upon the dignity of the senders by those very poor women for whom I wrote. The woman would, when speaking of relations in Europe, describe her own as being extraordinarily wealthy. Her father, by the account of each, had given his daughter a half dozen feather beds, chests of copper pots, and linens stack upon stack, besides six dresses made of material so strong it would last "to the fifth generation," and of course a huge dowry! They had not always been as here, they would assure mother, while they used the expressive speech of eyes weary with suffering and hands gnarled with toil. Our neighbours would say, "Do you see Mrs. Brawnsky, the distiller's wife? She wears silk dresses here on week-days, and at home she walked barefoot carrying water from the town well to my father's house." Mother would smile a bit when she heard such talk, and her needle flew faster. But one day father was present. Though it

was a mere woman speaking, he deigned to address her for her good: "My father had small worldly possessions. He had other riches. His riches lay in God." A dead silence ensued until presently mother spoke some kindly phrase that somehow made the air light, even father smiled, and I continued writing my letter.

From our kitchen table went letters into far corners of the world. The answers came with post-marks of Roumania and Hungary and Russia and England. By the time we began the study of geography in school I already knew from my letters the names of places about which our teachers told. London and Manchester and Chicago and New York and Boston were familiar names to mother and to father and to me. But to my mind all cities were alike. Those who replied to letters I wrote had, it appeared, the same troubles (no matter in which city or on which continent they lived) as had the neighbours next door to us, or on the floor above us.

VI

THOUGH my intercourse with my elders was in Yiddish, in the street we little folk spoke a curious jargon of Yiddish and English. It was almost a dialect, and later as a big girl in the sixth grade I once sorely puzzled the teacher by spelling bananas "pennennies," that being the Soho version of the name of the fruit. In Hebrew school and at home we spoke only Yiddish, and even we children spoke no English to one another until we had entered grammar school. Our prayers we spoke in Hebrew and there were prayers before and after meals, in the morning, at bedtime, on Sabbath, or holy days, on feast and fast days, when the new moon appeared, when the new month began, and at other times too numerous to mention.

On the evening when the new moon

appeared father, coming home at supper time, would take me out into the narrow courtyard. I stood at his side while he waited until the clouds of factory smoke rolled by, permitting the vision of the small silver crescent, delicate and fine. At sight of that curved light father uttered a blessing and my lisping child's Hebrew echoed his. After a little silence he would look at me with exalted eyes, and he would tell me that on the moon all the world gazed, that seas rose to meet her, and the years were wound about her beautiful path.

I knew father meant that the years were counted by the movements of the silver moon. But at school the very next morning I would recite to my teacher from our geography book the fact that days and years were counted by the revolutions of the sun!

I learned also at school of strange things altogether different from those father and mother knew. Indeed, much that was taught us by our teacher had nothing at all to do with the little kitchen in Soho.

To mother it was a constant source of wonder that we children were not only permitted

to go to *free* school, but that we were actually obliged to go. She remarked upon this frequently to one of her close friends, Mrs. Brownstone. Mrs. Brownstone herself would speak of the school whither her second eldest son went each day. We knew him well, with his pale face, bent forward, and a huge pack of books under his left arm. Every morning I would watch the tall boy walk up the street, turn at a certain corner, and disappear. He would stride rapidly, looking at no one, his "nose buried in his books," our neighbours said respectfully. When his mother, telling my mother the wonders of her son, would be asked, "And what will he be?" she could not reply. She really did not know.

I too came to wonder what he would "be." One day his mother told my mother that he was "through," and that he had taken "first honour." None of us knew what that meant, but Soho was proud of him. Then he left Soho never to return. The others forgot him. But to me he was always a mysterious figure, the first figure that I consciously

noticed in the long line I saw in the years that followed. That line held only boys. They strode up to a certain corner, turned, and disappeared from sight. I could not understand what they found just around that corner beyond the last tenement, no more than I understood when one day Mrs. Brownstone announced that her son had been made a professor in a college out west. It seemed absurd to me; during many years I carried a queer picture of him in my mind. For when I asked mother what it meant, she had said, equally uncertain, that a professor was a man who played the violin at weddings, or a doctor who required a larger fee.

Perhaps there are now many in Soho who know what a "professor" and "college" mean. Soho has grown to be much bigger than it was in my childhood, even bigger than it had become in my girlhood. It now has night schools, and a library. But we children of that day had not even the cinema theatre, to which our parents could go, and see, together with their children, a picture of the big world outside the ghetto, and so learn

of American customs, attitudes, manners, and standards, no matter how distorted. We never saw the interior of an American home, even as pictured on the cinema screen. Our parents read no American literature, they had no understanding of America. I did not even hear of the progressive group in the ghetto, until I was a grown girl; they were as much out of the life of our home and the homes of our friends as if they did not exist. To my father and mother all the universe was bound by their religious affiliations and by memories of the old land left behind. There was, to be sure, one old man who came in sometimes to our kitchen. His name was Mazersky. He was a magnificent figure, with flowing beard and deep voice. He was full of strange hungers and longings. He read queer books, the more queer because they were printed with an *English* translation beside the jargon. He would speak fervently of something called "citizenship," and he would say often, "I wish I were twenty years younger." He died, and at his death he was studying the speech of the country which he

felt he had found too late. He had no part in our life, though he touched it. By the others, struggling with the immediate problems of actual suffering caused by hunger and lack of work, he was thought just a bit odd. When he came into our kitchen mother would stop for a moment in her work to serve him a cup of tea before she sat down to sew, and to listen to him. But when one day I almost spoke to him he turned his fiery old eyes upon me, and his voice boomed out, " Well, do you know what it means to go to school? " I dropped my books and ran from him in haste and fear.

On Decoration Day, mother, obeying the request of my teacher, saved a nickel for me to take to school. For that nickel, we children heard, flowers were bought. We would sit in school, on that holiday, waiting primly in our seats until the great gong rang; at that signal all the twenty school rooms emptied their pupils into the central hall. Up the stairs to the platform we children saw climb a line of white haired men in blue caps that were no bluer than the old eyes in the

wrinkled faces. These old men (as I repeated to mother when I told her of them) were, our teachers said, soldiers. On the platform, in front of them, some one would make a "speech." And finally the teachers sent us home. I would rejoice that I could help mother for a whole half day. It may be that our instructors, trying to teach classes of sixty and seventy, meant to explain to us the meaning of the day, its association with great national crises, the pathos of those old men who had given both body and possessions for our country, and for the principle of a great man. I never understood, however. I do not think we would have believed it had it been told us that there was a connection between the little coloured children sitting next to us in the big central hall on Memorial Day, and the old men whom we rose to honour.

But more inexplicable than Decoration Day was July 4th. It was a day full of excitement and terror to our parents, who kept guard over us children all day long. Fire crackers and guns were the celebration of this

day, my father and mother knew. There were in Soho little girls and boys who told me unbelievable tales of a park, where on July 4th giant fire crackers flew to the sky, where McKinley's face appeared in gorgeous fiery colors upon a wooden frame, and the American flag burned in flame against the darkness of the night.

In my childhood I never discovered whether those wonder tales of flame pictures were true or not. No one whom I knew in the ghetto could really tell me why July 4th was singled out from all other days for special observance, least of all my own parents. No one could tell me why the flag burned against the sky.

Yet the American flag has always seemed to me a personal possession as if I had been its Betsy Ross.

Each day after school hours I went to Hebrew school; Hebrew school was in the kitchen of a friend of father's. We would sit, fourteen of us, about the table, I the only girl. In unison we read the Hebrew, in unison translated it. Our teacher was a

gentle old man whom we sorely tried, we children with our strange American disrespect. "Oh, you American children," he would say when we refused to remain in longer on hot summer days, the tiny room being full of smoke, of the smell of cooking, and the odour of our fourteen perspiring little bodies.

Curiously enough, in that Oriental atmosphere of the Hebrew school I learned what America, patriotism, meant. We children tumbled in one afternoon full of mischief. We found our teacher in tears, his old wife beside him tearing her pious wig and wailing aloud. We understood dimly that they were weeping because of something which their youngest son Jake had done. Jake had enlisted in the army. All the little lads were speechless before the wonder of it, and the big boys gathered in guards of silent honour about the new recruit. I asked Jake, resplendent in his bright new uniform why he wore "that." He replied in words that expressed in the simplest terms the ideal of citizenship: "I'm going away, childie. I'm going to work and fight and maybe to die for

America." And it was even so; for Jake was brought back dead from the Philippines. Before he left Jake gave me a little metal flag which he pinned upon my blouse. I stuck it into the wall under the framed mourning tablet hung up in memory of grandmother.

One day I found the flag gone, nor could it be discovered. I looked for it under every piece of furniture in the room. Finally mother asked, " But why do you want it so? " And, my eyes swollen with crying, I sobbed, " It's so pretty, mammele." Thereupon, drawing me to her knee, mother gave me a huge, uneven slice of black bread spread generously with home-made grape jelly and talked to me upon the vanity of loving things simply because they were pretty. Nevertheless I was not comforted. Then I found it, bent and broken and ruined in our baby brother's cradle. Tears falling silently I sat sewing all afternoon at mother's side while she ran the new sewing machine she had bought. I helped her to fold the aprons in the customary neat pile packed into Mrs. Stone's pedlar's basket every morning, but

I was too heart-sick to reply to mother's sentences. When, next day, I came home from school, mother called me to her and whispered, "Here! Do not cry so. Go up to Waler Street and buy yourself a flag, since you wish it so." In her hand was the money she had received as her share of Mrs. Stone's sales for the day. I sped to Waler Street. In the little store I held out my coin saying, "A flag, please." But the little hunch-back proprietor looked at me very sharply over her nose-glasses and told me calmly that it was neither July 4th, nor Election Day. However, upon hearing that mother had sent me she searched until she found a fly-blown box. I chose a flag. At the door was mother waiting for me, and together we fastened my purchase on the wall under the mourning tablet. Mother drew my face to her, smiling down upon me. You see, mother and I had really sewn for that flag of mine.

VII

AS I look back on the years of my childhood I can not remember mother without seeing upon her lips the little smile which was so characteristic of her. Often her smile came as sunshine in the dark hours of her life and ours.

No one has ever heard one complaint from her lips through all her life, not even when the candle of wee life of baby after baby was blown out in the narrow ghetto streets. Our baby was never the same baby two years in succession. The little cradle held a new burden every year, but the former occupant never lived to see its successor. Mother became a mother eleven times. Only the first four children lived. Perhaps that tells her economic story.

They were such frail little creatures, those American babies that mother bore. My

task it was to take them out for the " fresh air." Nearby was one street, cleaner, quieter, than all the rest. I would wheel the particular baby of that year up and down the still block of blank-faced houses. And sometimes one of the closed shutters would be open. Ah, I used to think it was a very beautiful face which looked out with the question: " Let me see your baby, little girl? " Mother would be very angry when she heard that I had spoken to them, the painted women. If I pleaded that they " were so pretty," she assured me that " good women were never beautiful except in the eyes of God "— and of their husbands!

There was one little sister with wax-like cheeks and hands. She lay so still that passers-by thought her a lovely doll. Mother would often take the limp little form in her arms, as if to hold it fast. The wise old women in Soho insisted that if the child were placed on a bed of peppermint leaves she would recover. Great bunches of peppermint leaves would be brought to us by the Italians who were just beginning to come to

live in Soho. The little sister would lie as white as death in the midst of all the green. It used to seem that it would not be so terrible if only this baby would cry. Finally one morning mother and father wrapped her in a great shawl, and father took mother to a car. Mother had heard that there was a big doctor who knew all about little children. I cooked the meal that noon. We waited for mother until late in the afternoon. When she came in her eyes were big and strange, but the little sister was as still as ever. Mother let her slip from her hands into the cradle. The doctor had been gone when she came. But the little sister had died in her arms in the car, and mother had not realised it until some one sitting next to her cried out. Mother had brought the dead child home alone in her arms.

We could not live in our home after that. To this day the smell of peppermint plants makes me feel faint.

In our new home I discovered the "little grey house." So mother and I always spoke of it. From the window of our front room

we could look directly at it. It was a little house with doors close shut to us all.

Although it was directly opposite our home, we seldom saw its inhabitants. The occupants of that house never sat crowded on the steps as did the dwellers in every other house. From its trim walls came no sound of babies' fretful crying, nor children's weeping. Even the laundry hung out in its yard was screened from the public by a sturdy fence so that one could not judge by that of the wearers. The tenants on the first floor of the little grey house were apparently forever out, for the shades were always half-down. Those living on the second floor never left their home, it appeared, for no one had ever seen them. Although it was known that from its doors came out an old woman and two old men, the dwelling was otherwise a house of mystery, absolutely cut off from the rest of us in the ghetto street.

When we children saw the old lady we backed up to the curbstone to permit her hurried passage into the house. Of the two old men seen coming out, one was tall and curt,

and the other lame. The lame old man often patted a child on the head, and smiled a very kindly greeting to the rest of us.

In mother I could excite only a feigned interest in the mystery. Indeed she would chide me when I strained out of our window in my efforts to look into the second story of the little house. But I persisted, hoping thus perchance to catch a glimpse of its occupants. How I did wish to know what was in there! And one day to my surprise I found out.

Mother had decided to have us photographed, and as soon as we older children were dressed we were sent out-doors to wait. Perhaps I was " dared " by a playfellow, perhaps it was my own childish wish prompting me: I ran up the steps and rang the bell. The door opened and there in the doorway stood the little old lady in her immaculate apron and spectacles. I did not know what to say to her. I wished that mother were near at hand that I might run to her. In the midst of my confusion a child sang out: " She's going to have her picture took! " The old lady looked at me and smiled. She called to

some one up the stairs. Down came the lame old man. They invited me into the little grey house!

They were so very kind to me that I was not at all afraid to speak to them, nor to come again. In the two or three visits which I paid them in their spotless dining-room, I learned that their name was Graham, that the lame old man had been a soldier who had shaken the hand of Lincoln, and that the old lady was "Miss Graham." Here was an old woman who, though not even a school-teacher, seemed actually contented, and was nevertheless — unmarried. It was most amazing to me. When in describing my visit I told mother that the lady was a "Miss," she shook her head pityingly and said "Poor, poor woman!" repeating it even when I declared, "But she doesn't look unhappy, mother!"

Once the lame old soldier told me that our street was named after a famous general. Then the grey-haired woman turned to me. She said that there had been trees all along the curb-stones. Only one family had lived

in each house. Every home had been bordered with a little garden. "There was nothing but English spoke in this street," she added. I did not realise then how bewildered and how grieved was she at the new people crowding into the once quiet old street. "It don't seem like home here," she said presently. "It's all so dirty, so different! And still the old house stands."

I too was dazed. I had thought that all people lived in Sohos spread far and wide in many states. This very street upon which we lived had been lovely with trees, the Grahams said. I could not believe that in *America* there could be places green with trees and grass such as mother had known "at home." Here all the land was crossed with broken pavements, here everybody lived in one or two rooms to each family. But Miss Graham described in detail a street that might have been, as mother said, a little park with little houses nestling in it. Mother, hearing the account from my lips, was as incredulous as I. When in the evening she repeated it

to father, we all went out and looked upon our street. Father sighed, and mother's smile faded.

Once our neighbours were astounded to observe that Miss Graham had entered our home. I interpreted from her to mother, proud to have them know one another. But mother said hardly a word, although she smiled shyly and pleasantly. She would never consent to go to the Grahams with me. She always told me that she was "too busy." And presently she lost all opportunity to see the American home which I had discovered on our street.

For the Grahams moved at last from the house. A tailor who struggled to maintain a family of eight took possession of the first floor. A negro family moved into the cellar. The second floor was taken by a huckster and his wife and children. The little grey house lost its trimness, its neatness. It grew grimy. It became ragged as if it were weary. The little grey house was swallowed up in Soho. I never saw Miss Graham come into our street again. But the old soldier came one

day, and stood looking at his former home, and went away.

The Grahams left. But mother and I spoke of them so often that it seemed that they were always there or that they had never been there. They left with me two things: History had become real to me; every soldier was in my mind a lame old man who held out a hand that had shaken the hand of Lincoln for my small hand to shake. And through knowing them Soho had been revealed to me: these streets were unclean; the houses dirty. And they had once been beautiful. It was as if they had shown me a pitiful ragged creature, and had pointed out his rags, and had told me they had known him young and gracious and debonair.

VIII

BECAUSE of the little grey house there came to be one sentence which I said often to mother: "Perhaps we also may live in a house some day." But mother always said reprovingly, "We have three rooms now!"

The three rooms to which we had attained were a kitchen and two bedrooms. For the added luxury of the bedrooms we gladly paid with the forfeiture of all light within them; unless the gas jet in the middle room was lighted, it was night dark during the day. The additional room did not mean more comfortable and spacious quarters for the pleasure of my parents. Into our little rooms there came to live with us, in succession, each of father's sisters as she was brought from Europe to America. They lived with us until they were married. Just as his father had chosen mother for my

father, so now did father select the spouses for his pretty young sisters. Neither in the choice of their husbands, nor in any circumstance of their lives, to this day, have father's sisters ventured to question his decision.

For the weddings of our aunts we had to have new costumes, of course. And those dresses which I wore were invariably white. That was not because in Soho the etiquette of dress demanded that children be attired in that colour for weddings. My dresses *could* not have been made of any other colour.

Before a wedding or a holy day mother would go to the drawer in the huge wardrobe. From it she would take out a parcel wrapped in tissue paper that crackled as she lifted it. She would unfold the heavy layers of silk in the wrappings and would lift up — her wedding dress. I cannot remember mother's dress whole. But I know it had an immense skirt, of which the silk was as stiff as cardboard. Mother would spread wide its voluminous shining gores and tell our aunt that hers had been the very first "crenolin" to be seen in her native town. Our aunt

would say, "I remember you were a very pretty bride," and they would speak of the wedding day and the guests. Presently mother's voice would waver a very little. She would shake out the crackling silk briskly and set to work to snip out another width. She would combine the silk with another material, and I would have a new dress to wear for the occasion.

With all the saving and toiling we were still not able to have the ordinary pleasures, such as parks and music. It seemed father could not earn enough. Nevertheless we children always had enough food, no matter how our parents fared. Even a sweet or an orange sometimes appeared upon our plates; Sabbath brought for us little girls delicious surprises which mother would take from the oven, to place unexpectedly before us. "For what is life if not for one's children?" mother has always said.

Still when chicken and ice cream were given us with all cheerfulness, books, other than prayer books, were considered an extravagance.

And I wanted books above all else!

To be sure, I had my school books. These, of course, mother shared with me as she had hitherto shared my letter-writing or even my play. I would recite to her glibly from the text-books, which amused her as often as they awed her. "The world is round?" she repeated incredulously. With her needle poised she would lean over the kitchen table, to see what I was doing on paper. She would laugh so heartily at the funny mathematical questions upon the solution of which I laboured most conscientiously. "If a room is nine feet by twelve, and ten feet high, how much will it cost to paper it if the paper costs twelve cents a roll and there are twenty yards in a roll?" I would look up to inquire. "What sort of room is it — a kitchen or a dining-room?" would ask mother. But when I told her it didn't say, she thought it very odd. None of the school books, for that matter, had in their covers a treasure that mother and I could enjoy in our daily life. In the intricacies of fractions, though she could not assist me, mother would

comfort me and encourage me. But when I read to her such a question as: What is $\frac{3/8 \times 9/7}{30 + (40 \div 5)}$ she laughed out loud and thought that even the serious business of school was very droll. "Nevertheless," she would observe thoughtfully, "there must be something in it that we cannot understand, childie."

Then, without introduction or expectation, I discovered English literature.

Near our home a rag shop was opened, to the delight of all the children in the neighbourhood, who loved to watch the rag-men sort out the brilliant pieces of cloth and silk and gilt braid gathered from tailor shops and dressmaking establishments all over the city. I could not sate my eyes upon the heaped brilliance of the piles of cuttings, each heap lying like a colourful jewel on the dusty wooden floor.

The proprietor, Mr. Rosen, would say to me, while he read with father at our table, "Go to the shop, and take something pretty, little one." Fortified by his invitation I

would sometimes choose a gay bit of silk for a doll's dress for our little Mary. One day I climbed into the loft of the shop to seek a scrap of pretty silk. There lay huge sacks still unopened, and piles and piles not sorted. Beside the "cuttings" lay a stack of papers flung carelessly together, old newspapers, wrapping paper, twine. With one shoe I kicked back a soft cloud of material. I saw what seemed to be a book. I picked it up. It was bound like an arithmetic book, with one cover off. The book was "Little Women."

I sat in the dim light of the rag shop and read the browned pages of that ragged copy of "Little Women."

Since then I have read profound and beautiful books which have inspired and stirred me. But no book I have opened has meant as much to me as did that small volume telling in simple words such as I myself spoke, the story of an American childhood in New England.

I had found a new literature, the literature of childhood.

I no longer read the little paper-bound Yiddish novelettes which father then sold. In the old rag shop loft I devoured English newspapers and magazines. I spent long hours there each day, stealing time in which I should have been at home helping mother. When a book was torn at a critical place I felt that a friend had been mutilated. And mother, though she laughed, began to bring me reading matter also: the wrappings of all packages and purchases were literature; the dress patterns copied on old newspapers from our neighbours were also literature. Even to this day I cannot see a piece of newspaper lying on the pavement without instantly visualising the kitchen table in Soho where I sat translating to mother English stories about strange people who spoke in strange terms and who seemed as queer to mother and to me as if they lived in another land.

My teachers told me that in our city was a library, a "house full of books," I exclaimed to mother. From the library they brought me books to read. I read history, travel, children's stories, fairy tales. Fairy

tales were much like the charming folk stories mother knew so well. Far more marvellous than the fairy stories were to me in the ghetto street the stories of American child life, all the Alcott and the Pepper books. The pretty mothers, the childish ideals, the open gardens, the homes of many rooms were as unreal to me as the fairy stories. But reading of them made my aspirations beautiful.

My books were doors that gave me entrance into another world. Often I think that I did not grow up in the ghetto but in the books I read as a child in the ghetto. The life in Soho passed me by and did not touch me, once I began to read. My interests, most of my memories and associations, were bound in the covers of books. No longer did our neighbours find occasion to censure me for playing; I read incessantly.

Books built a world, fanciful and strange, for mother and me, when I sat, translating to her word for word from the story before me. Mother would tell me that such people did indeed exist, for the Pan, the small noble

in her native village in Poland, possessed a house enclosed by a garden and his children were gay and happy and free. However, she told me that little girls such as I must not desire such wonderful things.

My little school-girl friends, precocious thirteen-year-olds, also discussed my books. Some of them scoffingly averred that there were "no such peoples like Jo and Beth." Some looked stupid. Some, with me, were eager for that unknown beauty which we knew only through the silent words on printed pages.

We little girls loved to gather after school and to recite the sicknesses in our families and to boast about them. Emma Sacklowitz, whose mother "was swelled with water," whose father had a crooked leg and a blind eye, and who possessed four sisters and three brothers every one of whom had, or had had, scarlet fever or measles or sore eyes, was the sharp-eyed little queen of these gatherings. In my own family we were disgustingly clean and well and our babies died before I could in honour call them sick "rela-

tives." Perhaps our delinquency in the matter of sickness was due to the fact that mother was what our neighbours called so " terrubly pertikler."

No Friday or holy day arrived without finding mother ready to meet it with a big wash-tub of water, a heavy crash towel, and four cowering little bodies waiting in the little kitchen to be rubbed dry. The tiny fat old woman who now taught us Yiddish composition was horrified each Friday afternoon to see us emerge into the middle bedroom, our bodies all warm and pink and perspiring from our bath. She was sure that some day we would catch a fearful chill, and she dared not think of the consequences. " But think of the consequences! " she would admonish mother. She would stay to watch with the greatest disapproval, while mother briskly dried each one of our small faces, pressed it against her bosom, and said, " Open your mouth, childie! " Into the open mouth went a huge wad of cloth heavily coated with coarse salt which mother rubbed vigorously and conscientiously over our gums and teeth

and tongue without partiality. How we did hate to have our teeth cleaned! But mother would tell us, as usual employing a quaint quotation, "Sweet words taste better from sweet mouths."

What I liked was to have mother entrust to me the important task of the Sabbath cleaning. Once every week all the furniture was moved, each corner meticulously cleaned and scrubbed, every window-pane polished. The stove was blacked until it gleamed, the copper pots and the brass candle-sticks were polished until they glowed golden red. Mother would come to look. "It is very well," she would say, and I was too proud to reply. At night we all sat tired and happy about the Sabbath table. The candle-sticks held tall white candles. Mother brought the loaves she had baked that day. Then she sat down beside father at the head of the table. Her eyes would beam upon us, her voice rose with ours to join father's baritone in singing the Sabbath songs, and there would be such a deep peace in our kitchen. The Sabbath evenings were evenings to which one

looked forward all the week long. Then mother and father were happy; and no plans were discussed.

One day mother said to me, " Childie, you are now thirteen years old. I do not know what your life will be. I hope it will be easier than mine. In America, to be a gentlewoman I hear, you must know how to play the piano. So you go take lessons. Goldie Sloan says she will give you lessons for a quarter, and you may practice on her piano. Not to make talk, better go in to Goldie by the back way." . . .

That was how I began to learn how to play the piano. Mother thus began to prepare me — consciously — for the life of an American lady. I wonder how she managed to spare the quarters for those lessons.

CHAPTER IX

WITH my adolescent life began a new task for mother. She became the buffer in our family life. I cannot think of mother except as of one who always stood between us and some unhappiness, or father. It was she who made it her task to explain us to father, to soften him to our desires. As I grew older I refused to speak anything but English. In the street I would whisper constantly to mother to speak English. Mother would try, but all she could manage was an occasional " You know " or a " plees-ameecha " to introductions. Of course I did not realise that unconsciously I was striving to break down all barriers between America, and me, and my mother. I felt myself intensely a part of America. I read " The Man Without a Country," and it filled me with terror and with grief. When father took out his naturalisation papers — his

" Americanisation papers," as I called them — I felt a personal thrill, a personal joy. I could not understand how mother could be so placid about it. " Now you are an American, father," I cried. But he said heavily, " No, I am not for America, and America is not for me."

He was finding it hard to meet the economic struggle in America. He was then buying a house, painfully, on small instalments, as many people who have small incomes do, with a mortgage towering above the small equity. We now occupied a kitchen, a dining-room, and a bedroom, and we had a bath room, of which I must speak more. The kitchen was cheerful. Into it opened a dark little dining-room. Like all the bedrooms which we knew in Soho, ours had almost no light. But there was an arid bricked little yard of our very own. Mother removed some of the bricks, and planted a bean stalk for us children. Father felt that we were progressing, within reason and decorum.

In her own group mother was a social

authority who was invited to all weddings, confirmations, and child arrival celebrations. And as a social authority she had social obligations. It may seem strange, but one of these was the lending of the use of our bath-tub. Ours was the only one on the street. Mother was full of an innocent pride in her bath-tub, and characteristically, she would say to her neighbours, "You know God made water, and I have the tub. Why, use it!" They accepted her at her word. On Fridays crowds of them, each person coming with his bundle containing soap, towel, and clothes, impatiently wait their turn in the bath-tub. All would come into the kitchen. And no one permitted the window to be opened lest some one catch cold before taking a bath! Mother would be in her glory. She would hold a public reception, as it were. All who came to bathe first told her their joys, the gossip of the moment, their woes. By the time the bathers had all been washed half of our chicken and stuffed fish for the Sabbath, and most of our home-made bread had been given away by mother to needy bathers.

Full of the lore of my physiology book, deeply impressed by its strange new warnings, I tried to persuade my father and mother that it was unsanitary — a novel word that amused my elders — to have our neighbours all bathe in our tub. I assured mother that it would be safer for her and much healthier for us (the latter guilefully, for I knew well that our welfare would carry weight with her) if we ate only thrice a day, and at regular intervals. How my parents laughed! "As if it matters when food goes in, childie, just so we have, God praise, enough to eat! And if your stomach asks for bread — will you read in a book, and tell it that it must wait?" they would ask, while mother smiled her indulgent smile.

However, I quoted my books industriously. I was beginning to desire many strange things, things I had not heard of until these last years of grammar school. But father was not always amused when I continued to be insistent about open windows and the abolition of fried food.

I intimated to mother that feeding very

little children more than a required quantity made them ill. Though she listened interestedly, she would not advise her friends to do as I quoted from my books. With all the wisdom of my fourteen years I preached to her friends, placid-eyed wives of wise men learned in Holy Law, who each sanctioned his spouse's training of his children. The mothers of many children would look at my mother's child,— and would continue their placid smiling.

At school we were learning how to cook. Very carefully I suggested to mother that perhaps she would like to have me translate some of the recipes for her? Mother, to whom the women in all the houses came for delicious recipes, teased me with the gentle raillery with which she met all my new desires. But observing how deeply I desired it she asked if I really wished to have boiled vegetables. Staunchly I affirmed that I did. However, at sight of the watery food upon my plate I was obliged to admit myself defeated. I could not eat the dish mother had prepared. I saw sorrowfully that it did not seem well to

work out all the theories I was learning. However, I could always persuade mother to try out any idea I brought home, provided that it did not " irritate father."

CHAPTER X

THE first quarrel between my parents was caused by my schooling, although they had not quarrelled during all the bitter days of direst poverty and adjustment to the world of an American ghetto. For I heard of High School. A representative sent by the board of education came to tell the graduating class of our grammar school about high school. He told us that education was the means of best preparing ourselves for that finest of all things, " effective Americanism." Even the most poverty-stricken home in the ghetto aspired to send forth one son as lawyer or doctor into the world. But it was unheard of for a girl, a poor girl, to wish to go to high school. And I wanted to go. I had no convincing reason to give for my going. I could not even say that I wished to prepare myself for a profession, for I did not. There was

only that desire in me leaping up to plead that I be permitted to go to school, that I too might become part of that life which leads to a new ideal: effective Americanism.

I was afraid to speak of my wish openly, and when I merely intimated it all my uncles and my aunts silenced me by replies spoken lightly, and dismissing my hopes as not worthy of serious thought. To father I never mentioned it, of course.

Father had come to look with growing distrust on my longing to know things, upon my books especially. It was without his knowledge therefore that I took a reader's card at the public library. When he came in I would hide my books in the cradle or under the door step. Mother would pretend not to see me. But one day father arrived home unexpectedly early. I tried to conceal the book I was reading, and he discovered me with Oliver Twist bulging from the covers of my prayer book where, with trembling hands, I was trying to hide it. He flung the novel on top of the tall book case. He told me in his intense restrained angry voice that my English

books, my desire for higher education, were making me an alien to my family, and that I must give up all dreams of continuing beyond the grammar school.

There was a stillness in our kitchen.

Then in a voice of rare tenderness father told me that he wished me to grow up a pride to our people, quiet, modest, a good home maker. I was to marry; I too could be another Rachel, another Rebecca. All I could think of while he was speaking was that in two months my school days would be gone forever. I could not answer. I could only look dumbly at mother who was nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. When father had gone she climbed on a chair, for mother is a very little woman, and gave me my book. We said nothing to father's words; my parents have been lovers always and mother closed any protests made to her by saying, " He is the father."

Father always walks with his lips close shut, his hands tense, and his large hazel eyes raised, as if looking into distant skies. His attitude and his gait are deeply expressive of

his mental attitude. For the glory of those ideals in which he believes he willingly sacrificed himself that he might shape the destiny of his sisters. He would joyfully sacrifice himself for any of his children, that they might follow the path he believes the ideal one. He could not see that I might have ideals different from those held by him, my father. For to him his own father is still to this day a beloved teacher, and the letters which grandfather sent to him in America are worn thin with constant reverent re-reading. It is as if father turns still to the written words of his father to guide him, as he once was guided by the words spoken by the lips now long silenced in death. Father expected me to obey him also without question, of course.

I could think of no words which I could say to him. And besides, through all the pain of my disappointment I dimly saw that when classmates of mine were finding it difficult to persuade their parents to permit them to graduate from public school, it was preposterous of me to dream of high school. It

was mother who, due to her natural quickness and her deep sympathy with all her children, understood. She did not question whither my desires would lead me, nor what part she would have in their consummation.

Mother and I were always chums. Though she could not read one word of English there was not one book I read of which she did not know the narrative. She knew my "marks" at school. She knew my friends. She hated and loved my teachers as I did. It was as if she lived my life with me. But during all the hot summer months after my graduation from grammar school, months wherein she and I sewed side by side, we let fall not one word concerning my wish to go to high school. Some of the lads who had been in my class at school came in with shining eyes to impart to us the tidings that they had "jobs" to "sell papers after school," or "work in tobies at night." That meant that they could go to high school. While they spoke I would drop my eyes, heavy with tears. Every one seemed to take it for granted that I would continue, in the

years to come — just in the little room in Soho.

If father came in, I would rise instantly, afraid of what might be said. But father said nothing. I feared then that to him it was as if all had been said. His eyes would turn toward us two, as we sat with him in the evenings in the kitchen, he studying, and mother and I sewing. Somehow I understood that mother, though she did not tell me so, felt with me that with the approach of the first Tuesday in September, the day when high school opened, a great storm would break.

It *was* a stormy scene.

Mother tried in vain to calm us. I was frightened, stammering, but pleading through my tears to go to high school. Father continued to repeat: "Impossible." I felt my throat go dry. And then mother put down her sewing, interposing her first suggestion: "Let her go for a year," she said. "We don't want her to grow up and to remember that we denied her life's happiness."

Oh, I had known in my heart that mother would help me!

XI

THE night before school opened mother and I sat up all night sewing my sailor suit for the next day, for mother could not spare a day's work on one of us children. On Tuesday morning I trudged off, tremulous, expectant, with her eyes following me, to high school. The grammar school had been on our street, in my old neighbourhood. But I was the only girl of my class to go to the Central High School. The school itself was outside of the ghetto. My classmates were to be strangers to me.

They were indeed strange to me. Coming from the ghetto into the high school was like coming from a foreign country into America. I know now that, in truth, the stories I had read in books had been to me just beautiful fantastic words until I came to this new school. Here were children who were not

nobles, as were the happy ones in Polish towns, but boys and girls like myself; and they were yet as fortunate as the sons and daughters of the Pan of whom mother told. I could not understand their references to their home, their play. Some of the words they used seemed words from another language. I did not know what "dessert" was. "Tennis" was a curious word to me. And when they spoke of their *fathers* "playing" *golf!* I did not know their simplest standards, the simplest forms of their daily life. I felt embarrassed and humiliated and strange with them.

What an embarrassing moment was that one when I opened my first lunch-parcel! I noticed with misgiving that the others had brought boxes. I brought a newspaper package which mother had prepared for me while I hastily brushed Fanny's hair and rocked the baby for her. I saw that the boxes of the other girls held dainty squares of paper, white cloths; I could not understand. I opened my newspaper. In it there lay a mass of fried potatoes, crushed tomato,

huge, irregular slices of bread, and a chunk of filled fish. Mother had risen at daybreak to cook some fish for my first meal at school. There was a gasp of sympathy from the girls. I must confess that I myself would not at that time have been greatly shocked — had it not been for the other girls.

"Oh, it got crushed. What is it?" asked one.

"Of course you must throw it away," commiserated another.

I threw it away.

There were offers of sandwiches, fruits, pie. I had never eaten a sandwich before. They seemed very meagre fare to me. I was hungry for my mother's bread and fish. Thereafter, though, I threw all the lunches which mother gave me into the trash can outside the school building.

The lunch hours and the walks in the companionship of my new classmates were perhaps even more illuminating than were the sessions with our teachers. At first I was too bewildered to make friends, too busy in looking on the life to touch it. One day the

white-haired principal of the high school said to me in a deep voice that made me jump, though his blue eyes twinkled: "Still surprised?" Indeed, as he had observed, I was constantly "surprised," in the class room, in the presence of the strange young girls and boys. The picture of their girlhood which was reflected in their conversation was incredible to me. It appeared that most of them had never done anything but *play* during all the years before they came to high school. This circumstance they seemed to find perfectly natural. Furthermore, the girls with whom I studied and talked and lunched were not in the least embarrassed to confess that they had played until they were as old as thirteen even, and one huge freshman of fifteen still rode a sled and was not ashamed to have us know that she loved so juvenile a toy.

After one Latin examination a girl with sunny hair came up to me. She said, "Will you have lunches with me?" That was the high school formula requesting friendship. I replied joyfully that I would. I found my

first American girl friend, the first friend who had not been born in Europe or in the ghetto of Soho. I brought this new friend of mine to my home to meet mother. My school-mate looked about her with wide eyes; it was her first visit to Soho. Mother smiled to her, and she smiled to mother. Their conversation went no further than "How do you do?" When my friend had gone I asked mother, eagerly, was she not all that I had described her to be? Mother laughed, "*I* can't judge her by her words!" After this first visit when my friend and I came to my home after school hours we did not stop to speak to mother. I would throw down my books in the kitchen, and ask mother, "Do you need me, mammele?" though I knew she would say cheerily, "Of course not!" And off I would go to the freer atmosphere of the street where my friend and I talked of all our common trials, and hopes, and affections, in the intensely interesting world of our school.

My friend had such odd concepts. After a long school day she said, "I'm going home to rest!" I laughed out heartily in appre-

ciation of her humour. But — she meant it! School was to her not a delightful pleasure at which one felt guilty all morning and afternoon, and for which one apologised to uncles and aunts constantly; it was not something vaguely absurd and quixotic. To her it was a *duty*.

The neat young report-teacher gave each of us a slip of white paper one morning, and directed us to write " for what we were preparing." The other girls and boys scribbled busily; a line or two quite summed up their future course of life. Next to me a brown-eyed girl extended her slip to me. On her paper she had written: " I expect to go to college." I asked her why she wished to be a stenographer, to which she replied indignantly that she didn't! The college of which she spoke was not, as it was to girls in Soho, a " business college." The girl next to me in the high school meant that she was going to a college such as boys attended. I had never heard of a *girl* who went to college. But the strangest thing repeated by me in our kitchen was the statement that married women, the

mothers of some of the girls, had gone to college! "There are many strange things and people you are learning, childie," said mother, with interest.

For just as mother had shared with me the description of it in the books I read, so now did she share with me the wonder, of this new world. She would listen to every detail I repeated. For even outside of my friends there were many marvellous things at high school. There were men teachers who were as dainty "as brides, really," mother declared when she saw them at a high school event to which I persuaded her to come. There were people in our city who had never seen Soho, I discovered from the lips of one pale-faced girl. There was something called beauty, our teachers in the English classes and the drawing classes said. I learned for the first time what a flower was when, sitting in the botany class with the other freshmen I too plucked the golden petals from the tender calyx of a nasturtium. I found the slender stamens, the sepals. I had never heard of a petal or a sepal, except in books. I had

never seen the golden dust from which bees made their honey.

In my second year at high school still a deeper pleasure came. With a chum one day I walked out past the park, past the scrubby out-posts of the town, into — a wood, a "wald." It was a wood such as mother used to describe, a space pillared with great trees, carpeted with purple flowers and thick grass, roofed by skies.

We plucked great arms-ful of golden-rod. Late in the afternoon we left for home. At last I turned down the paper-strewn pavements of Soho's main business street. I walked up a narrow side-street. At once children began to crowd about me, each asking, "Give me a flower?" "Can I have a flower?" As I walked they pressed closer. I drew out flowers as I walked, to give them. But I knew that I would be obliged to stop. At a corner where stood a push-cart pedlar crying "tomatoes!" there was a push; I was dragged back and forth. Lean little arms pulled at my arms. I felt myself crying. I stood near the scared push-cart pedlar with

my arms quite empty. The little children of Soho had taken the golden arm-ful I was bringing from my "wald" to mother. Despite my sixteen years I wept like a little girl when I told her.

XII

IN my freshman year at school I became friends with three girls who are my friends to this day. We four lived in various parts of Soho. There was so great a difference between our mothers! One was the wife of a ghetto physician; she was a cultured woman whose nun-like quiet life was spent solitarily amidst the busy women on the crowded streets. The other mother was a woman engaged in business; she struggled for success that she might help her daughter into beautiful surroundings. The third mother, a friend of my own mother's, was full of a surpassing ambition for her daughter; her ambition eventually took her child literally away from the ghetto and placed her in the best musical school in Europe. Those three mothers were each working for a goal which they understood. Mother was conscious of

no goal to which she was striving for me. But none of my three friends had a mother more loyal, more constant in her love, more a chum and a tender friend, than was my mother to me.

Mother and I grew closer than ever before. She was intensely proud of me. She would stand on the corner with her purchases of fish and chickens for the Sabbath and flaunt my wisdom and my knowledge before all her cronies. Every one knew when I won a prize, or read a " paper," or passed an examination. To mother there was but one student at high school, and that student was her daughter.

To the standards of the people I was coming to know she altered her standards, her speech, her dress. She even altered the whole plan of her home for me, following a truly extraordinary discovery I made in the planning of homes.

On a visit to a teacher I was taken into a room devoted not to eating, nor sleeping, nor cooking. In this room were pictures, bric-a-brac, books. There was a piano. It was a room, they said, set apart simply to " sitting."

The room was a living-room. I tried to understand what it would mean to have such a room. I could not imagine people coming together to sit in a house without working while they sat. It made "living" a special, separate, thing. . . .

In the evening I described the room at home. Father lifted his eyes from the open book lying before him on the oil-cloth cover upon the kitchen table. "Not a study?" he asked incredulously, recalling grandfather's study "at home." "Not for cooking or eating or sleeping — not even a place in which the men study?" repeated mother.

"It's a room for rest. Just a place in which to meet friends — and sit," I tried to explain.

"Oh," said mother quaintly, "it must be a sort of Sabbath room!"

I wanted a Sabbath room. I wanted a room in which one simply sat. I had no clear idea of just what I would do in it. But I had no room of my own yet, and the upper story in our house was rented to another family. I pleaded and pleaded for my room.

Neighbours and relatives laughed in astonishment mingled with amusement at my wish. Some one told me that I was selfish, and I felt my heart contract at the accusation. Those who had seen "parlours" thought me presuming. But for the first time I requested something which would occasion my parents a sacrifice. I felt that it was imperative that I have that room. And mother said, "She's a big girl. Why should she be ashamed before her friends?" Father looked at me then. "She is a big girl," he said thoughtfully. The following spring the tenants moved from the second story of our house. We had more room for ourselves. We had a living room, a "sitting room."

In one corner we put a folding bed. In another was a table. There were chairs and chairs. And a little book-case which mother had bought somewhere to surprise me. Here at last was a "Sabbath room." Here was my room. My room came to be different from every other room in the house. I did not notice the change in it, as I did not perceive that I was changing. The pictures,

the pennants, were each a token of what I was learning, in the stages of freshman, and sophomore, and junior, in high school. My room became also (though I was not conscious of it then) the symbol of the difference between me and the others in the other rooms of my parents' home.

In the evenings after I had helped mother with the work of the home, and then with the sewing, I would say, "Now I must study, mammele." At first I used to study at the kitchen table. Amidst the chatter of our children, and the unceasing conversation of visitors who dropped in with their children, I sat, attempting the stupendous task of concentrating on "learning by heart" German and Latin conjugations, and geometry theorems. But it became my habit to say, with a little look at mother: "I must run into my room a while." Gathering my books under my arm I ran to the peace of the living room. Presently it came to pass that, when I came home from school, I would drop my books on the table of my room, rather than on the kitchen table, as had been my custom.

I felt very guilty to study in my quiet room. For the visitors who came to call on mother would raise their eyebrows when I disappeared. "You are getting proud," they would say. However, when I asked, "Won't you come into my room?" they invariably but politely refused, though they were mollified by the invitation.

Mother would come often to look into my living room. She would buy a chair or a little rug and even finally a carpet, for its beautifying. She crotcheted doilies for the table, embroidered covers for the chair backs; much of the work of her hands went into that room. But I cannot remember ever having seen mother sitting in my living room.

Mother, who never saw the interior of a home such as those to which I was then beginning to go, would ask me eagerly, "Do you like their house?" And she would nod sagely when I said I did, or shake her head when I said I did not. After every school pleasure she would meet me with the query: "Did you enjoy it?" No day was too hot for her to spend at the ironing board; no

price was too large for her to expend upon any garment when I wished to go to an "affair." She would flutter about me, adjusting ribbons, critically seeing whether shoes and stockings showed any signs of mending. And when finally I was ready to go, she would come to the door, and watch until I was far beyond the turn of the corner. When I came home she would be at the door waiting for me.

It was as if she had a vicarious thrill and joy in my pleasures and achievements. She did not in the least understand what basket ball was, but how her eyes shone when I ran in to her with the unbelievable tidings that I had been put on the scrub team! As soon as I came home from a game she would ask me from her seat at the inevitable sewing, "Well, who won?" She never knew how, or what, or why, we "won."

XIII

THERE were few of my old schoolmates whom I now saw. Their interests of work and the ghetto pleasures occupied them as my lessons and my new friends engrossed me. At sixteen the girls about my home were beginning to "go out" with young men; a few were the objects of pardonable delight to parents who rejoiced that their daughters were being sought in marriage at so early an age. To all of them the paths of life led into a home on a ghetto street, or if they were fortunate, to a little store in a little town nearby.

My new girl friends were children of sixteen. Our life was filled with laughter and chatter about things of the day; there was not one thought in their minds of the responsibilities of the future. They would catch me in the current of their fun, and

before I knew it, would have me one of a knot of lassies whose books and rosy cheeks were no more the sign of their young girlhood than were their clear eyes looking out on life as if they saw a game. Our ideals lay between the covers of books. David Copperfield and young Newcome and Peter Stirling were the imaginary heroes to us. There were also the majestic and poetic figures in Tennyson's treasure house of fine men: "The Idylls of the King." Of these books it was hard to tell mother even the story. She would listen uncomprehendingly while I enthusiastically described a tournament to her. But the death of Little Nell brought a moisture to her eyes. She understood the human problems and sorrows.

Sometimes on coming home mother would enter the door into the house with me. I found that she had been away upon an important mission; she had been "collecting" for a motherless bride, a girl often not much older than were we at high school. Mother would collect that dowry without which a bride would feel dishonoured in coming to her

husband. It may sound impossible, but in one day (during the hours when I attended classes at school) mother, together with a crony, had collected a dowry. She would come home with a large handkerchief quite heavy with money, a fitting result to her work of the day, a day during which she had made a house-to-house canvass in the ghetto. That is the ghetto's way of doing charity. No one had inquired of mother for whom the money was being given, but every woman had gladly contributed her three or five pennies — or even a magnificent quarter. There was enough in the big handkerchief to pay for kitchen ware and bedding for the bride-to-be. Soho thus contributed to the making of a new home in America.

The matchmakers in the ghetto began to approach mother and father to ask if they had not best be looking for some young doctor or lawyer for me. Mother would be filled with immeasurable pride. She saw me the wife of the haughtiest doctor in the ghetto. . . .

How different it was at high school! I was meeting girls whose ancestors had fought

in the Revolutionary and Civil wars, girls whose very life was bound into the life of our country. There was nothing that seemed to me more wonderful than to have been born of parents that were Americans. Some of my classmates had names which had been the names of children when first Plymouth Rock was touched by the first immigrants to America. On Decoration Day girls and boys who sat by my side in school went with their parents to place flowers on the graves of members of their *families*. The sorrows, the dead of their land, her pride, were their sorrows and their pride. Sometimes at home it seemed to me impossible that I could be in the same city with those children who were of, and part of, America.

Soho was growing bigger. Before mother's eyes and mine quiet streets about us, streets which we had seen orderly and well-kept, were becoming filled with a steadily growing population of new families. Before my eyes I saw streets change just as Miss Graham, long ago, had told me that she had seen her street change. In those days I could

always tell mother everything I felt. And I grew to hate our little kitchen which try as we would, we could never long keep tidy. I hated the ugly, smelly pavements where the frowsy women stood gossiping with ill-kept children in their arms. A great sense of oppression came to grow upon me, as if I, with them, were imprisoned in the narrow streets of Soho. Mother would listen quietly, but understandingly.

Little by little, though, we were changing in our own home. We children now openly spoke English to one another, not only in the street, as always, but even in the house before father. Even to mother we often expressed our thoughts in the strange tongue, giving quaint jargon turns to our phrases that she might understand us the more readily. For instance we would declare to her, "I won't go if my birthday falls out on a Saturday," or we would ask her, "Shall we put another potato here in?" One Thanksgiving father brought home a turkey and for the first time we tasted the huge national fowl, which mother compared to ducks and chickens and

geese that had been the *pièce de résistance* at ceremonies and weddings long past. From the head of the table (decked with a white cloth as if it were a holy day) father told us many a tale from the Talmud while mother as usual listened with rapt admiration. Duly modest, I then explained the meaning of the day; though mother expressed her approval she advised me seriously that one must not give thanks only on one day and for one bird!

The white cloth which had been spread on the table on Sabbath and holy days only, now displaced the red cloth even on week days. Napkins were served at meals. Once after we had removed the dishes from the table and I turned to leave, mother looked at me archly, saying, "Wait, there is more. You forget." With eyes twinkling she placed on the cloth a bowl of apples; mother had introduced dessert to our meals. Ah, mother tried so hard to do in her home as "they" were doing in those other homes I was coming to know!

It was my first school party which made me

realise how different was my mother from the mothers of all the girls who were now my friends. There was no mother whom I had ever seen in Soho who could approach my mother. I was very proud of the little curls blowing about her rosy cheeks, of her trim, plump, little figure in its close fitting waist and apron. On holy days she dressed in neat sateen, or even in cashmere.

All my standards fell before the vision of the strange mother I saw at the party given by my classmate. I could not believe that the woman who opened the door to my knock was my friend's mother. A woman in *white!* Why, mothers dressed in brown and in black, I always knew. And this mother sang to us. She romped through the two-steps with us, and judged the forfeits. I had always thought mothers never "enjoyed," just worked. This strange mother opened a new window to me in the possibilities of women's lives. To my eyes my mother's life appeared all at once as something to be pitied — to be questioned.

As mother helped me off with my things

when I came home she asked, as was customary between us, " Did you have a good time, childie? " While I described all that happened she smiled and nodded alternately. I could not have explained why I hesitated until the very end before I told her of my friend's mother. Somehow I was afraid that mother would be hurt at the picture of that white-gowned, laughing, young mother of my classmate, and something cut into my heart at the thought of hurting her. When finally I did describe her, and her dress, and her gay romping with all the young girls and boys, mother's eyes came to mine. I dropped my own until I had finished; I could not endure to see that strange look which for the first time in my life, mother turned to me. Then mother said simply, " It is very late and you must go to bed, daughter."

XIV

I TOOK honours at high school. But I did not know what to do, where to begin. The man who had the deepest influence upon my life was the white-haired, keen-tongued old Yankee scholar, Dr. McFarland, the principal of our high school. It was he who first showed me that I could make myself an American woman, no matter whether my parents or environment were American or not, that America had need of such as I, young people eager, enthusiastic, with ideals, and a deep and supreme love for her, and an understanding of that old life from which so many of America's new citizens come. "You must be the interpreter of the old to the new world, and of the new to the old," was the large vision he held out to me.

It was he who decided that I must go to

college. He came to my parents with the news that I had won a scholarship, and with the demand that I be permitted to use it. All the girls whom I had known in my childhood were already assuming the burdens of life; many were already married. And I wanted to go still to school! There followed a strange interview between the Yankee minister and teacher and my father, the Polish rabbi who spoke in his halting English in reply to the crisp sentences of the other. With his characteristic forceful voice my teacher described to my father what college would mean to me. Father listened intently. Beside him sat mother, a great deal frightened by the important man who was in her house. She brought wine and home-made cakes; it was quite a quaint ceremony at her hands. Father sat very still while the doctor spoke in that dark little dining-room of ours, for it was like mother to take her own guests and father's into the dining-room rather than into my "Sabbath room." Finally father, choosing his words carefully, with difficulty, said, to Dr. McFarland, "Sir,

do you know you are the first American gentleman who has spoken to me in America?"

It was true.

In all the years of his life in America, father the scholar, the dreamer, had never really met a real American. He had met people who spoke English, the language of America. They were the bums in our narrow streets, the crooked politicians in our ward. There was not one man whom father knew as an American — who was a gentleman.

Neither father nor I realised that it was through me, and the education which he had opposed, that father met his first American gentleman.

During the course of the long interview father told the doctor that he could not understand what it was I wished. "If we let her go to college," he said, "it will only draw her away from us forever, and from her people also." Presently he asked seriously, "Whom could she marry if she became so learned? There would be no one among our own people to suit her." And he added

gravely, "I could not afford a dowry large enough to get her a lawyer or a doctor." At that mother interposed hastily, timidly, but eagerly, that he need not worry about that; she was saving for my trousseau, and besides, a girl such as I would require no dowry!

Dr. McF—— did laugh then!

Of course mother saw to it that I went to college. That June I persuaded her to come with me to the baccalaureate sermon at the college. As the girls in their gowns, with the soft whiteness of their dresses just gleaming through, filed into their seats mother's cheeks were as flushed as mine. There were wonderful things I saw in the future, things worth suffering for. I pointed out to mother the chancellor, some of the teachers. The music of the service, the nearness of my own desire's goal, made me feel solemn and afraid. Looking at the others in whose midst we sat I wondered if I could be part of these women who were so different from those among whom I had lived during the past years. For a moment I almost wished to run back home, to that which was sure and familiar.

Mother too was looking at the men and women near us, behind us in the gallery. She folded her hands and then touched mine.

"Do you want me to be like them?" I whispered to her. My eyes were full of tears.

"Yes," said mother.

So, in the old gallery mother declared her intention to give me to that strange new womanhood of America, and I registered that fall.

XV

COLLEGE! College means the culmination of most girls' young womanhood, the gate through which they enter into their individual life. But for me it meant things I cannot write down: new friendships, new ideals, new standards, of course. But it meant more than that. It meant not only a new life; it meant to me a new self. Entering college was to me as if I had in truth been born anew.

In those first months at college, amidst the men and women students from cities all over the state, I learned that there might be innocent fun as well as toil — for me also. I discovered that men and women need not have the one relation of marriage; that they might be friends, as women are friends with women. I learned that I was an American college woman.

On the very first day I entered college, and came into the narrow, long room which was the "girls' room," I found that I was not different from any young woman who was sitting in it. Among all those girls I, who had lived all my life in the foreign atmosphere of Soho — belonged! There was one girl with Irish eyes and wild-rose skin whose gaze met mine, and we smiled to one another; I knew that we had found each other as friends. Another girl, a senior, with grey eyes and heavy golden hair, took me under her wing. Nor did the others find me curious, or — interesting. They saw me as one exactly — like themselves. Something sang in my heart when I thought of it.

I was no longer a wistful girl looking on. I entered that little American university, and I was accepted as part of, and I grew into, American womanhood in its friendly white walls.

Ah, I do not think one of the others could have known what every task and pleasure meant to me. My friends, my daily work, my hopes, were centred in the college walls,

as if they were a treasure house from which my riches came. On holidays when the lecture rooms were empty I felt lost; but often and often I would come up to the grounds just to walk through the white rooms, to feel the physical nearness of the place.

To me no hour could be formal or drab. Through the classical club I came to know the paintings of olden times, to have as part of my life the beauty of nations long dead. The Latin classes gave a new dignity and meaning to my old lessons in the Hebrew school, and I found that other nations had also lived and written. In the literary club one could express one's self upon principles and emotions which others understood and felt in common. History was told us by Dr. Dyess, a fine and rarely upright man who opened to all of us the riches of his scholarly mind; and to me he gave a new vision of life and illumined all history and its ideals. In the library, where I spent hours in turning the leaves of beautiful books, Shelley and Browning first spoke to me.

Toward the end of the first semester a

great undertaking was assumed by one of the college clubs. My golden-haired senior, now my friend, invited me to share responsibility with her. Rather breathlessly I thought of it: we were making arrangements with the Ben Greet Players to give a performance under the club's auspices. She and I felt a thrill each time we passed the little theatre where the play was to be given. We trudged through rain and snow selling tickets, urging principals of high schools to persuade their students to come. Our great day came. Despite all our faithful work, our glowing hopes, our venture into the field of dramatic art did not succeed. On the day of the performance the house we had so surely hoped to find full was half empty. After the play we stood watching the audience straggling out into the wet street. We trotted down all the steps from our vantage point in the gallery. We tried to look very dolefully at one another. But our eyes met. And I could not help smiling. The other girl's clear voice rang out with mine. For had not she and I touched finance, art, drama? . . . We were

properly abashed at our lack of success. But after all, *we* had caused Macbeth to tread across the stage that day!

Walking home, half-running with excitement, I felt myself smiling. How often there was occasion for happiness in the new life at college! I remembered lines that had been said in the play, lines familiar through our own study in the Shakespeare classes. I hardly knew where I was walking until I bumped squarely into some one. I looked up to see that before me stood a haggard woman of, apparently, thirty years of age. Whimpering behind her toddled a wee child. It was evident that the woman was soon to be a mother again. I began to stammer words of an apology. The woman pulled her blouse shut about her throat. I knew her in a moment, before I had said the first syllable. She had been one of our neighbours when our home had been opposite the Grahams. This woman who seemed to be thirty was only two years older than I. Though we now lived within a few squares of one another I had not seen her for years. I had not heard of her

marriage. "You're so busy you might as well live in another city," she said with a friendly diffident smile.

On the evening when she was bringing forth to Soho another child I was at a college dance. When she stood, only a few weeks later, drearily watching the earth close over the little life that she had borne, I who had played with her only a half dozen years before, was standing with parted lips, waiting to see how our beloved Latin teacher would receive the silver loving cup which I had helped choose for him. I did not even hear of the other girl's sorrow until months afterwards.

It was not only that I belonged to a new world. My world grew each day. In the classes were young women whose home life I learned and shared, and from them I came to know the meaning of our land in the intimate daily experience. One Thanksgiving a number of us spent together with a classmate. Hers was so quiet a home that I was not confused by formality and servants. The house, small and neat, snuggled against

the side of a little hill. In that place the dwellings were so far apart that living in my friend's house was like living in a home-world of one's own. We ate the big Thanksgiving dinner in the midst of laughter and jest. But there was just a shadow of sadness through all our enjoyment of the day, because of those "who had not enough to be thankful for," our host said. The shadow lay perhaps less lightly upon me than upon the other girls. We spoke of the customs which had come to cling and to grow about the observance of the day. The father accompanied us when we took a long walk that afternoon through the sprinkling of snow that powdered the streets and yellow roads. Spontaneous, merry laughter rose again and again from our lips as he told us many a joke and tale. And he enjoyed with us the stories of college fun, and listened understandingly to the serious words that the quiet afternoon brought from our hearts.

In the evening we sat in the soft light, our friend at her father's knee, her older sister by the fire, and we others about the mother.

Presently the father read to us, and we spoke of what he had read. All my life that day will be to me the interpretation of Thanksgiving, its austere and simple beauty, its peace. When late that night we girls snuggled into the snowy beds the mother of the house came to see each of us, her gentle face the last image that we took with us into our dreams that night.

I became so much part of the life about me that only when I came home in the evenings could I think of myself as part of the old ghetto, of Soho. I did not notice how I was leaving behind me not only the ghetto, but its people also.

XVI

AND mother? There is so little to say of mother and myself during these college years because she had so little part in them. There was no longer need for me to do the household tasks with mother, since I was earning money by teaching at night school (for I worked my way through college). The Sabbath scrubbing which it had been my pride to perform, and which had left me happy, and wet to the skin, was now done by a negro woman to whom mother spoke in her quaint English. Grandmother's copper and brass were now polished by the hands of my younger sisters. Sometimes mother and I saw each other only for a few brief moments when I left for college in the morning, and for another few moments at night when I came home, tired from teaching. I taught in that school near our home where

I had myself been a pupil in my childhood. Our neighbours and the people who lived about us came for instruction to the immigrant classes where I was a teacher. Sometimes I would find a relative of one of my students, or perhaps even a student himself, talking to mother and father in the little dining-room. When I sat down conversation would halt, as if I could not be expected to be interested in those affairs of which they were speaking so earnestly to my parents. Mother, although she glanced again and again from my pupil to me with pride, would yet sit strangely timid and self-conscious.

In the early summer evenings it was mother's custom to sit on the steps of our house, crocheting by the light of the street lamp opposite. Sometimes, after night school, when it was very warm indoors, I would come out also, to sit beside her, an open book upon my knees. Children swarmed on the pavements. Opposite us a little man coughed a hoarse little cough that caught one's heart. Frequently there arose a brief sobbing cry from some child. A

mother's frightened, scolding voice would shrill through a window as an automobile lumbered down amidst a crowd of boys playing in the street. Women passing stopped to greet mother. Occasionally a grandam would rest for a moment beside us. There would be a brief conversation, and then silence.

Often mother would put down her work, rise swiftly, and walk down the street with her quick little steps. And presently she would re-appear, a girl coming with her who nodded to me a shy, sweet-lipped greeting. Mother had gone to invite her to come up to our house, "and keep us company." In the years past it had not been necessary for mother to seek another when we two were together. The girl with her was a newcomer to Soho. Mother had discovered her, wistful and lonely, with only her medical preparatory studies to fill her need for friends.

After our greetings had been exchanged we would stand, the girl and mother and I, as if waiting. Hardly a word would be spoken until mother said, without raising her eyes,

"Had you two not better — take a little walk?" A few sentences followed. My friend and I would go off, leaving mother to crochet in the light of the street lamp.

I knew that mother's eyes followed us until we disappeared around the corner.

We, my companion and I, spoke only a phrase now and then as we trudged up the streets of Soho. We needed no words. We both understood and we both desired the same thing.

Once we walked and walked until finally we came to a street in which the houses were each lawn-bordered. Great heaps of living snowballs lay white upon the green of the grass. We stood sniffing in the odours coming from unseen gardens which were hidden in the darkness of the night. We climbed to the terrace and looked into a lighted living-room. We seemed enveloped in something beautiful, exquisite, unseen. Catching each other's hands, we leaped down.

In the summer warmth fell the first drops of a light rain. We began to run. Of one accord we put out our arms and "flew"

through that beautiful dusky green street. And it seemed to us that we were truly flying away — from Soho. The soft wind beat against our faces, flowers and trees sent perfume to us in our flight.

And then a cluster of lights showed in the dark distance.

"That is Soho we see again," said my companion.

We dropped our outstretched arms.

Somehow I felt that all my life would be a flying away from Soho, a struggle to leave it, a brief space in beauty, and then suddenly I would turn to find that I had returned to it.

I had a brief momentary picture of mother sitting alone there on the steps. When we came home, she was still crocheting. Her glance met mine. But I said nothing. I sat down beside her. And presently we spoke, of things outside our lives, of the dresses which the passers-by were sporting, of the weather, and even of an item in the newspaper, which my sister had read to mother in *English*.

Mother was doing her utmost to "move

on" with my sisters and me. She tried breathlessly, as it were, to catch up with us, with the new, and yet not to lose the old, to be American for us, and still not to leave her husband behind. She tried to speak English, broken sentences that ended in her cheerful little laugh, as she would admit defeat and relapse into comfortable jargon. She even struggled with the English alphabet, but she could not master the mere ABC's. "I am one of those who work with the hands, and not the head," she would say deprecatingly. And her hands were making exquisite laces and daintiest embroidery for me to wear. Her hands were also busy at that time with a secret task which I did not hear of until years later.

For at that time mother and I did not speak so freely as we used to speak. And she began to look at me often in a manner that brought a tightening to my throat. Heretofore I would have gone to her and asked her what was troubling her, what I could do to help her bear her burden. But now I was afraid to speak, afraid to ask her.

For I half knew the reply to my question, and I knew that mother would never answer my question, lest she might hurt me by what her answer would imply.

Ah, at that time I did not even stop to see how her eyes were looking upon the path I was choosing, the path that turned abruptly from hers. There was so much to occupy me in my life of the moment, in my hopes of the future. Even my unhappiness was something apart from her. I know now that mother felt afraid of me, of the girls I knew, of the tall young men who came to see me and who spoke only English words in a manner that made them seem infinitely remote to my eager little mother.

I thought it was Soho I was leaving behind me. But mother — not mother.

I did not even know that mother and I were drifting apart until there came a certain evening in early winter in my last year of college. I had planned to spend that evening with a friend from whose house we were to go to some pleasure together. "You will go to college right from her home to-morrow, of

course," said mother. I nodded. And we spoke no further. My head ached with many unanswered questions, and my heart ached also, with fears for the future, fears that rose again and again that day to confront me. It was my twenty-first birthday. I entered the quiet parlour of my friend and greeted her. She flooded the room with light. Laughing, excited, stood a crowd of college men and women gathered to "surprise" me with their good wishes. I could not have told them how deeply moved I was. The laughter and the joyousness lifted me up, tearing me away from the thoughts that had been with me all that day. How gay and happy and friendly were we all! Just by being together in the same room we created a world that was ours. My friend and I remained awake talking into the early morning. It was not until after lecture and then night school next day that I came home. At the door was mother, waiting, shivering despite her shawl, in the winter night. "You are late," said mother anxiously. In a rush of happiness I told her of the unex-

pected party, of the friendliness and the joy. "Just think, mother, my twenty-first birthday when I became a woman!" I cried. There was a little pause. "When you became a woman — strangers rejoiced with you," said mother.

As if I had been suddenly wounded it came to me that in that formal marking of my attainment to womanhood mother had given neither her home, nor the help of her hands, nor her own presence. She had never seen the house where it had taken place. *My* friends were "strangers" to her. I wanted to tell her about it. But the words lay dead upon my tongue.

Mother and I had come to the place where we could no longer remain together. I cannot state the tragedy of that hour better than in just those words. I did not then realise what it meant to mother to see the diverging point of her life and mine. I had not then a little son of my own.

XVII

NOW mother was not only out of the activities and interests of my life as she had been during my high school days; she was also out of the understanding of my life.

The college life surrounded me like a great and beautiful sea, filling every hour of the day. My days were spent on the green campus, in the sunny lecture rooms. My holidays were with my friends. The vacations which had formerly meant so much time that mother and I could spend in work together, I now spent away from home. One summer I lived at a farm house. My friends and I visited neighbouring farms. I saw a cow milked. I plucked my first pink little radish, and joined the others in laughter because I felt guilty when I ate it. All the pastoral beauty which we had seen in the

poems of Milton and Horace and Wordsworth I found in the world of to-day. How beautiful life could be!

I was at home very little. Mother and I spoke briefly and constrainedly when I was. It came to be that often I did not even note the little changes that were made in the house, which the others discussed so animatedly, until mother eagerly drew my attention to the new chair she had bought, or to the new tablecloth she had just finished embroidering. But mother did not ask me, I now remember, about those things that were part of *my* daily life. I was an alien in my mother's home.

I loathed it at home. Oh, it was not the poverty I minded! I have never wanted *money*. But the women who came in their slovenly dresses, content in their stupidity and their cloth, the men who spoke intolerantly and without understanding, of religion and economics, the pale girls who simpered and toiled with the one aim of a dreary married life, the young men who were untidy and dull or overbearing and conceited when they had education — that was what I saw in the

ghetto. I could not look into its heart as I since have done.

And at college were opened to my eyes windows upon splendid and beautiful visions. With my classmates I saw the ideal of the new women which we, the college girls of this country, were to be. I heard of the serene and wise and conscious motherhood, the strong and sane and effective women in professions, the fine and cultured wives that it was our destiny to become. We were the new womanhood that the great universities were sending out into America.

My college friends were already preparing for that effective fortunate life of the cultured woman. We were planning for Commencement Day.

Others with me had made the pilgrimage from the narrow ghetto streets into the broad avenue of American culture. There were those who had ideals, who looked to a vision in the future beyond the drab daily life. They with me were facing the problem: "What shall I do now that I have become part of America?" I knew well what those

boys from the narrow, crooked streets about us would do. They would open little offices in dingy ghetto homes; they would practice among sad-faced ghetto clients who would not even be able to afford the fees that they would be asked to pay. With all of America's wealth of training, ideals, in their hands, those boys whom I knew would yet be unable to leave the ghetto. They would remain tied fast to the old immigrant environment.

That was what I might do. Why, I realised poignantly, I would never live in America! I would live in a little Russia crowded into an American slum.

All my life, all my interests, centred in the college walls, with nothing beyond them. When the college days would be over this wonderful world would disappear forever from me like an enchanted castle that had faded in the night.

During the second semester of my senior year I walked about dazed, not meeting mother's eyes. To my classmates there were great vistas of life after the sadness of the graduating day. There were homes in which

they could come to bring their work, their pleasures. But for me — there was nothing.

One day in the winter of 1910 mother came to me to say timidly, "Are you ill?"

I shook my head.

There followed the strained conversation that had become usual between us, although then I had not even noticed that it was strained. Suddenly I cried out, "Mother, I can't stand this. I can't live here. I can't live this life. Oh, father was right; he has been right along! I wish you had never let me go to high school or to college. It was a mistake! Oh, a bitter mistake! I see what I wish to be; but oh! how can a girl ever get away from — here!"

Mother stood as if I had struck her. "Not a mistake," she said in a very low voice.

But I cried myself to sleep.

The following day she asked me, "Is it — we who are — hard for you to live with?"

Little mother! How tortured you must have been all that night as you lay thinking that out.

Of course I told her, quickly, with all my

heart, that it could never be she or father who would be "strange" to me. "It's the house, the dirty street," I tried to explain to her. "It's like living in a foreign land here."

Mother nodded. "We'll see," she said.

I knew she meant she would speak to father. For months she spoke to father. She tried to persuade him to move away, to take a little home, "with a garden and a porch, like those near the park."

But it was in vain she spoke. Father could not even see that what I hated, nor why I loathed it. He liked the "happy crowds" of dirty, pitifully underfed children "playing" in the filthy gutters; he did not even perceive the unspeakable plumbing in the yards about us. That the first floor of the house down the street contained men of such character that the police knew them by sight held no terror for father. As he said, all his friends, his synagogue, were in the neighbourhood. All his memories during the last eighteen years were centred in those crooked streets. Mother could not alter him. For

him the ghetto, so real to me and to other young people like me, does not exist. For father lives in a world altogether cut off from the world about him; his is a world of the past, a world built by the ancient rabbis in whose footsteps he walks. He said to me one day slowly, "I belong to the fifteenth century — and you, my daughter, to the twentieth." Mother and I could not make him understand.

A new and sudden and fierce revolt rose in me. I resolved that, since my parents would not permit me to live my new life according to my new standards with them, I must break my life from theirs. I must leave Soho alone. I resolved to go to New York after graduation, to live as do thousands of young professional women, young American women. I do not know now how I, a girl, found the courage to plan this, this course so unheard of.

On the solemn fast day, the day of Atonement, mother came to me to bless me as has been the custom in the family for years. Father had given me his blessing almost in

silence, and had gone to services. We were alone, mother and I, in the house. And as I kissed her I said with lips dry, " Mother, I am going away." Mother dropped her hands. " Please," I begged. " I can't live here longer, mother. Mother, I hate it here ! "

" Of course," mother said to me. Mother said not one word more.

The following week she came to me to tell me that she was preparing for my going away, that I must not worry. " Do what is necessary for your plans," she said.

There were such stormy scenes while I prepared to " go away." How my mother's brothers and my father's sisters protested. How black their prophecies were. How they cried that I was " an example " to their children. I am the oldest of all the clan of cousins in our family, and to them I presented the unparalleled example of a girl at high school, and at college — and now *this!* One day I came in to find them gathered in solemn council upon me. I was called in. I listened with cheeks aflame. I had come to think of

love as of something that came unasked, beautifully, magically. And they spoke of marriage as one speaks of a family arrangement.

There was much I wished to tell them. But when I would enter a room to find a group heatedly discussing me, mother would begin to speak in the sudden dead silence, nervously, without stopping, amidst all the unspoken disapproval, until I left.

I had been saving all that which I did not require while at college. It seemed a very large sum to me. I wrote to New York to that school where I wished to prepare myself for the profession I had chosen. The autumn after I graduated from college I went to New York. I left home.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN New York I not only studied in an American school, but I lived — lived! — in an American home. Although I had lived in America for nineteen years, it was now for the first time in my life, as a woman of twenty-one, that I became part of an American home, a home that was not a foreign spot in America. For the first time in my life I lived in a home which mother did not make home. I was cut off completely from the ghetto, from Soho. I had become completely a part of America. There were no days now to divide between the American life at college, and the ghetto life in Soho. For me the conflict between the two worlds was over.

At the school in New York there was an entire group which had come from the Soho of New York — from the East Side. In the

lecture hours they sat together. Walking they were companions. They had lunches at the same table. With me they were shy and embarrassed. Had I not understood I would have been bewildered and offended, but I realised that they were keeping me out of their life because they were afraid of the other circle of which I was a member. At home also I had known young men and women who had been afraid to leave Soho, afraid to become part of the world outside of Soho. I did not wish to lose the one group at the school, nor the other. I wanted the American enviroment in which I felt at ease and happy, but I hoped also not to lose my old life. Now that I was away from them the people whom I had known in Soho, they seemed to me infinitely dear. I saw their suffering, the qualities which made them fine and good.

There was only one of that small group at school whom I really came to know. She was a tall slender girl with ardent eyes and the most winning childlike smile on her serious spectacled face. She had suffered hun-

ger and loneliness and poverty, for a principle. She was preparing to enter social work in order to continue in this new land what she had been doing as a young girl in her Russian city. She would speak with unenvious wonder of my home in New York, of the superiority of my good fortune to her own.

One evening at her boarding place I met a number of her friends, students in medical schools, in dental schools, men and women much like those I knew in Soho, except that these, like my friend, spoke with a foreign accent revealing the speech of their childhood and youth in Russia.

Late in the evening, after we had talked about all the idealistic and philosophic subjects under the sun, with animation and eagerness, and all of us were tired, and our throats were dry, and we were all convinced that we were each right, but that our neighbour was a very clever fellow, we sat silent at the little table in the tiny kitchen. And then some one said, "Let us sing."

At college groups of us meeting at ball games, at Hallowe'en parties, in picnic

crowds, would sing often. We would choose most often "Auld Lang Syne" or "Heidelberg," "Gaudeamus Igitur," and "Love's old Sweet Song," always ending with our own college verses set to music.

Our hostess, her childlike eager smile appearing suddenly cried out, "Sing! Let us begin, well —!" And she herself broke out in a little enthusiastic soprano. I was never so startled in my life. For they sang with all their hearts, with tears in their eyes — the Marseillaise. And then the room rang with melodies of stirring Russian hymns and the songs in their native tongue, songs of aspiration for freedom, and songs of courage under oppression.

To all those young men and women America meant a place to which one brings ideals. America stood for liberty, the liberty which Shelley, whom they all loved, held sacred. It was of liberty that they were singing. They spoke of America with love, with gratitude, yet never for a moment did they forget that other country — their "mother country" whose tongue they spoke.

I sat there as one outside. I was alone in all that ardent group singing the songs of another land. I had always felt that America was my birthright. I had always felt that, like many a child whose parents have remained in the Sohos of the land, I had been caught in some eddy that had pulled me away for many years from that which was mine. I knew that evening that America had always been mine. Among those young men and women with dreams and desires, even with a problem like my own (though none of them knew it) I was a stranger. For I had not one moment, not one inkling of the feeling, which stirred them, except as one feels for that which is noble and fine — outside one.

My mother country had always been — America.

It was only my home that had not been American.

A new and clear ideal of the American home came to grow in my heart during the months that followed.

In the four walls which enclose that which I call so simply " an American home " lie the

treasures of the world. From the doors of each American home wind invisible paths leading to the beauty and art of all ages, which our cities keep for us in public galleries. From the threshold of each home spreads a great highway taking our children to the learning and wisdom of poet and sage in the public schools of our country. In its four walls live American citizens, who each have the privilege to help make those laws which govern a great nation conceived in the spirit of liberty. That was the idea which grew in my heart during the months in New York. And the new life, with its work, its ideals, lay like a shining road before my feet, before my eyes.

In the spring I went for a brief rest to the country home of one of the settlement houses where I had been preparing myself for my work. The great frame house stood by the side of a rippling bay close to the Long Island shore. There came to the house in that early frosty spring some of the tired workers and leaders in the settlement centre in the city, to take advantage of the peace and quiet

of the empty rooms. It was too early still for the people in the tenements crowded about the settlement, to come down for pleasure and recreation. But there was a frail little Jewish lad, with marks of the East Side on his thin face. There was a smiling narrow-chested Italian woman who was seeking a reprieve from death. There was a dour-faced old Scotchwoman with large bones and humorous eyes who smiled at her own pain. Here I lived with immigrants and I was not of them.

My particular comrade was a young southern girl who had broken from the traditions of her Virginian family to come up north to study nursing, as I had broken from the old-world traditions of my family to enter the field of work for women. We spoke often of the difference in the beginnings of our lives; and we saw with wonder how like were we in thought, in speech, and attitude, and interests. Living there together in that house by the sea, we were two young women who were friends, and who were twenty-one.

One day we walked along the shore of the

bay, over a bare sandy neck of land to a row of great white sand piles that stood sharp against the clear sky. We held our caps in the sweeping wind. Our cheeks were warm with the keen cold of the early spring-and-winter weather. We climbed up one of the sandy mounds, falling back, laughing and pushing on again, the southern girl eager and oddly smiling. And suddenly there we were at the top of the mound that had stood like part of a white wall between the sky and us. Before me lay a great foaming vast expanse of water, rushing to my feet, flowing back, coming from the horizon to us two alone there on the measureless shore, retreating from us into the invisible distance. "This is the Atlantic Ocean," said my companion breathlessly. But I did not find it possible to answer her. I stood as if I were alone, at the edge of the great waters upon which I had been brought as a baby by mother to America, and which I had never seen again until this moment. Far out on the waters we saw a ship, a faint grey; a ship bearing strangers to us in America.

CHAPTER XIX

I HAD not been very practical nor very wise when I made my arrangements to "study and live" in New York. When I returned from my rest I was confronted again by the problem I had faced before I went away. I found that I had hardly enough to pay for room rent and car-fare. I tried to live on one meal a day. Then I wrote to mother.

I shall not forget that letter from mother. It seemed to be brimming over with her. It was a letter full of love and such happiness, such a full joy, as if I had been lost and she had found me again. Mother was simply too full of the joy of being close to her daughter's needs, able to help her, to know that she was really needed. Many times did I read that letter from my mother. It was as if she had come herself to bring me her love and her comforting. I knew then, as I read and

re-read her letter, how lonely mother had been when I had been at college, how far from her she felt I had grown. In the light of her joy at our coming close again I realised for the first time that during the last years I had left not only Soho behind me; I had almost left MOTHER behind me. The thought terrified me.

And mother had suffered.

I wrote long letters to mother after that illuminating letter from her. I was wiser now. I did not tell her of my school, nor of my friends, nor even of the new enviroment in which I lived, for I knew that they made her feel lost and strange. I began to understand that these were not the things which were a connecting bond between us, but that they were rather obstacles standing between us. I could not explain them to mother, and my nearness to them made her feel that I must be far from her. Instead I wrote to her of that which we both had in common — our memories, our acquaintances in Soho. I asked if the copper pots and the candle-sticks were kept polished to her liking. We wrote

of my younger sisters, and of my cousins, who, as my uncles and aunts had darkly prophesied, were indeed following "my example" by going to high school; even the girls insisted on the privilege. But strange to say — their parents were proud of them! I wrote to mother of the plays I saw, of personalities I met. They were not famous people of whom I wrote; they were simply my friends, intelligent and interesting, and to mother I tried to make them as real as they were dear to me. Often I used to think of the letters I wrote as a child in Soho. Now I was writing only to my own mother, and only for myself.

And I wrote to mother about my lover. For my husband and I met at college in New York. Mother was hardly able to believe that I had fallen in love. I could imagine from what my sisters told me how she told every one, everywhere, that her daughter had fallen in love with, and was loved by, a marvellous, super-human, superlative male. I did not describe my lover except to tell my parents that he was an American.

I would not permit my lover to tell his people about us until he had seen my home, my folks, my environment. With all the new and beautiful and intimate meaning that an American home held to me I went to my mother's home in Soho to wait for him there.

Mother met me at the station where she had been waiting all day long impatiently. She held me close to her. She kissed me on the lips. She overflowed with joy. "So you have fallen in love. You are to be a bride," she repeated until we came home, as we walked through the cluttered streets from the station to our house. I wished her to tell me what she had been doing, what she had been planning, if there had been weddings or births in the family. But mother only smiled and said that she had been altogether too much occupied with other things to know how friends and relatives fared. She wanted to hear everything about "him."

Mother and I sat in the dark little dining-room or in the hot kitchen preparing for my lover's coming. "And are his people very

different from us?" she would ask me, but would continue, "To think that I'll really have a son-in-law, yours yet, childie."

She spoke of the betrothal feast that we must have, of the cakes and the wine that must be prepared. Her eyes would shine to me with a soft radiance when we looked at one another. I could imagine all that she was planning, all that she was remembering. She spoke often now of that day long past when, in her own white wedding gown, she had come under the wedding canopy to become the bride of my father. She recalled how her mother had kissed her, weeping to see her only daughter married," but rejoicing nevertheless that her son-in-law was so learned in Holy Law." Mother quoted to me many a phrase from the lips so long closed in death. "She was like the women in the proverbs," said mother proudly.

She had lived near her mother, she told me wistfully, but on that wedding day she did not foresee that four years later she was to leave her mother as one leaves the dead, for she came to America, and her mother died with-

out ever seeing her again. We sat without speaking for a long time after mother had spoken. Presently mother said very tenderly, "I am glad you are to be a wife. When one's eldest daughter marries it is as if she were both daughter and little sister," she added with a profound sweetness that made me feel that my heart was too full.

One evening mother looked at me archly after one of our talks. Then she said, "Come, childie." And I found out the secret, that which "had made it impossible" for mother to care "what happened to friends and relatives" because she had been so "occupied with other things." Unknown to me, for years, almost since the day on which I had graduated from high school, mother had been keeping and increasing that secret. In a huge wooden box there lay piled piece upon piece of embroidered linens for bride and bed, and fine laces ready to be used for years to come, as well as hand-made samplers fashioned after the pattern of her own girlhood. There was a table cloth of black "fisher's net," as mother called the

loose web-like background which she had woven, and upon which she had embroidered in green and red wool, a loving dove sitting on a bough above my initials and the date. Of this she was most proud, because she herself had not had such a piece in her own trousseau.

"Will it do?" she asked. It needed no pretended enthusiasm to praise her handiwork, to delight in it.

But how her eyes shone when I asked her if I could have some of the laces from her own pillow slips and table covers put away for remembrance at the bottom of the trunk. From one pillow cover I took two wide insertings of hand-made lace that mother and grandmother had made together while they waited for father to come to take his bride.

Mother insisted also that I take the two heavy brass candle-sticks made for her at her own wedding by the village coppersmith, and brought to America into our little kitchen. She pressed upon me also a brass mortar and pestle for "my kitchen." When I asked for the old copper fish-pot which had been made

for grandmother, and later given to mother, and which had been used by us for so many years to cook the Sabbath fish, mother was delighted into laughter. "You must cook good fish in it," she adjured me happily.

The kitchen was crowded all day long with women who came to look at me with a new glance of camaraderie; I, too, was to be a wife as were they! With them mother spoke briskly and definitely upon a most important topic; they were filling the feather-beds and pillows which mother had made for me, as her mother in Poland had had hers made also. Of each woman mother inquired rigidly whether she had remembered that only the breasts of the geese were to be plucked, "and each feather picked"! They would come, their heads covered in an aureole of down, and with great bags under their arms. The bags were full of soft down. They seated themselves in the little bricked square yard, and while mother, with eyes snapping and brilliant, supervised them, they filled the cases she had already sewn, waiting for the cloud-soft contents.

Sometimes in the evenings I sat watching mother at her work, and we said nothing for many moments, for my mind was full of memories of all that had happened in the preceding year in New York. You cannot imagine how strange it seemed to me to come to mother's home after the homes I had shared in New York. Perhaps if you contrast your own home with the one which I have described you will understand how I felt.

Mother would not let me help prepare for "him." She washed and scrubbed and ironed and cooked and baked. Mother feels she's not being hospitable if her guests leave her table with unimpaired digestion. The house was full of sweet and toothsome dainties to give him delight; its walls were gleaming with welcome for him.

I went alone to meet him, to bring him to my home. I shall not speak of that. But we knew that we loved one another, and that nothing mattered.

At the threshold of my home mother ran out with her characteristic almost childlike eagerness to meet him. I cannot forget her

face as she saw him. They tried to speak to one another. And my lover knew only English, and my mother only Yiddish. They had no common plane on which to meet, no common thought, nor interest, nor memory. Even in me each saw a different person.

We went into the house, my lover and I. Mother silently followed us.

To me the days flew.

So we were married. And mother said good-bye to me. And I went from her with a stranger whose language she did not understand into a life she did not know. I left her, as she had left her mother when she went on the far voyage to America.

CHAPTER XX

MY friends are now my husband's friends. My home is that kind of a home in which he has always lived. With my marriage I entered into a new avenue. We have travelled. We have worked at tasks we believed in and loved. We have our little son. I have not written much to mother about my life. My letters have been — just letters. Her own letters have been growing briefer these last years. She never came to see me in my home.

It was our little son who was the real cause of her coming finally. I thought of his birth as the tearing down of that barrier that had come between us. Mother was intoxicated with the delight of her first grandchild, the first child of her first child. "Now we understand each other better, now that we both are mothers, my daughter," she wrote to me,

not knowing how much more than she meant to say her letters told. I, too, felt that in my own motherhood I saw the explanation now for mother's unquestioning unceasing striving and toiling and hoping and planning and achieving for her children. "Now I can find the joy of all mothers again. I can find my lost young motherhood in your child," she wrote. "I am coming to my grandson."

Mother had not travelled since she took that long trip, twenty-five years ago, from Poland to America, to come to her husband. And now she was preparing to come from Soho — to us, to her first grandchild. We were excited as the letters from home told us that they were. Day after day, my sisters wrote to us, women came to mother, giving her messages to take to me, whom they had known so well as a child. They brought mother cake, and jellies, and wines, as if she were about to travel a year instead of one night. My aunts came to help her sew her clothes, my uncles came to pack her suitcases. It was as if all Soho were coming here to us in the person of mother. Father hurried

back and forth securing mileages, a berth. He carefully explained to mother what a berth was, and warned her above all not to forget to give the black man, when he gave her her hat, a quarter. My sisters wrote such dear letters, describing it all there at home.

We could hardly wait. Our little boy asked every day for "grammy." There came a deluge of telegrams to us, which clearly told us the haste and nervousness in the little home in Soho, and we knew that mother was on her way to us.

She came in the morning. She did not stop to kiss me, nor to look about her, but as soon as she entered my home she cried breathlessly, "Where is my grandchild?" And she held him to her, and the tears filled her eyes. "Such a boy! But a boy!" she cried. We had written to her that our boy was speaking now. She sat down beside him, and she crooned love-words to him.

Son is a friendly little lad. I felt that, if I left them alone together, he and mother would grow close in a day or two. I peeped

one morning into the nursery. Mother was standing, looking dully at the spotless baby-cot, the white wicker chairs, the little washable rugs on the floor, the gay pictures on the white walls. Her worn plump hands were folded one upon the other in a gesture that I know. Little son was in a corner, gravely building a tower. Little son has been taught that he must play without demanding help or attention from adults about him, that " son must help himself." In Soho little boys are spanked and scolded and carried and physicked and loved and fed all day and all night.

Mother called to little son a quaint love name, and he turned to her with his bright smile, understanding her love tone. Then he quietly turned away from her to his toys again. And mother stood there in that strange white baby world which was her grandson's. Perhaps she was thinking of what she had thought to find him, like one of the children of her own young motherhood, dear burdens that one bore night and day. She was afraid to touch the crib, to soil the

spotless rugs. Here was her grandchild, they were together, it is true. And her grandchild had no need of her. She felt alien, unnecessary.

I felt the tears in my eyes. I ran in, called son to come to play with grammy and mother. He came readily, laughingly, speaking his baby phrases that are so adorably like the words we adults, his parents, use. I had been anticipating even before she came, how much mother and I would enjoy his baby talk. But mother said in a very low voice, "You say he speaks, daughter. I do not understand the words he means to say now. And — he will never learn — learn my language."

And mother's first tears fell.

We had planned for every hour of her visit to us, even for the hours of needed rest between-whiles. In those rest spaces she would come into our living-room. She is not accustomed to sitting in living-rooms. Her life has been a life of toil. And our living-room is to her as strange a place as was to me the first sitting-room I saw long ago.

She looked with a little smile about her. She glanced at the bookcase, filled with books she cannot read, and about things she does not know. Finally her gaze rested upon a certain place, and my eyes followed hers. There stood the old candle-sticks which she had known in her father's home in Poland, and which had stood in her own kitchen in Soho. And there, in my living-room stands also, with its bronze curves holding autumn leaves — the copper fish-pot! "In America," said mother quaintly, with a little "crooked smile" only on her trembling questioning lips, "they have all things — so different."

There is no need for mother's pot in my kitchen; it has become an emblem of the past, an ornament in my living-room. Mother cannot understand our manner of cooking, the manner I learned *away* from home. She cannot eat the foods we have; her plate at meals was left almost untouched. She does not understand my white kitchen, used only for cooking. When she came into my kitchen my maid asked her quickly, eager to please her,

pleasantly and respectfully, "What can I do for you?"

So mother went out to the porch, and she looked out upon the tree-shaded street. And an infinite loneliness was hers, a loneliness at thought of the crowded homely ghetto street, where every one goes about in shirt sleeves, or apron and kimono, where every one knows his neighbour, where every one speaks mother's speech.

She cannot understand my friends, nor they her. I am the only thing here that is part of her life. I for whom those hands of hers are hard and worn, and her eyes weary with the stitching of thousands of seams. She helped me to come into this house, to reach the quiet peace of this street. And she has come to see this place whither she toiled to have me come; and now that she came to see my goal she was afraid, lonely. She did not understand.

There is nothing that we have in common, it may appear, this mother of mine, and I, the mother of my son. Her life has lain always within the four dim walls of her

ghetto home. And I have books, clubs, social service, music, plays. My motherhood is a privilege and an experience which is meaningful not only to my son and to me, but to my community. In this short visit of hers, for the first time mother saw me as that which I had always wished to be, an American woman at the head of an American home. But our home is a home which, try as I may, we can not make home to mother. She has seen come to realisation those things which she helped me to attain, and she cannot share, nor even understand, them.

But there is one thing we have in common, mother and I. We have this woman that I am, this woman mother has helped me to become. And I shall always remember that, though my life is now part of my land's, yet, if I am truly part of America, it was mother, she who does not understand America, who made me so. I wonder if, as the American mother I strive to be I can find a finer example than my own mother!

There are many men and women who have gone, as I have, far from that place where

we started. When I think of them lecturing on the platform, teaching in schools and colleges, prescribing in offices, pleading before the bar of law, I shall never be able to see them standing alone. I shall always see, behind them, two shadowy figures who will stand with questioning, puzzled eyes, eyes in which there will be love, but no understanding, and always an infinite loneliness.

For those men and women who are physicians, and lawyers, and teachers, and writers, they are young, and they belong to America. And they who recede into the shadow, they are old, and they do not understand America. But they have made their contribution to America — their sons and their daughters.

THE END

HORNE'S
Book Shop
PITTSBURGH

W8-BKC-773